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ASTON MARTIN *driver*

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Photographer Anton Watts shoots the Lotus Esprit and Porsche 911 with the Aston Martin behind in 1998

FIRST CONTACT

IT'S 25 years since I first drove a DB7, when, as a fresh-faced, 25-year-old aspiring journalist, I helped a well-known motoring magazine with a four-car photoshoot on the Suffolk coast. Pitched against a then new Lotus Esprit V8, Ferrari 355 and Porsche 911 Carrera, in terms of performance and interior packaging, the Aston was overshadowed by all three and the feature's writer, Jason Barlow, placed it last. "Whatever its aspirations, the DB7 is outclassed in this company."

Yet, while I remember little about the other cars, the DB7 left an indelible impression on me, and not just because the early satellite navigation didn't have any of Norfolk's roads mapped, leaving me lost.

Despite my inexperience with such cars, even I could recognise it was the most elegant looking of the assembled quartet and although the 3.2 was unrefined compared to the Ferrari's V8, it was still powerful.

A quarter of a century later and after driving two very different examples for the car's 30th anniversary feature on page 14, my view hasn't changed. I'll be the first to admit, though, that whatever the iteration, the DB7 isn't the greatest built model in Aston's long history but it remains one of the prettiest. And although the Jaguar-sourced straight-six lacks the smoothness of other, more modern units, the 5.9 V12 fitted to the later models transforms the car into a rocket ship.

Who knows what I'll be driving in another 25 years. But one thing is for certain; I won't forget my first DB7 experience.

Paul Walton
Editor

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UP FRONT NEWS

Ultimate DBS revealed

Aston Martin has revealed the DBS 770 Ultimate, the most powerful Aston Martin production car ever made. It also marks the final development of the DBS before production of the model comes to an end.

Available in both open and closed form, the DBS 770 Ultimate will be built in strictly limited numbers – 300 coupes and 199 Volantes – with all examples sold ahead of release.

The Ultimate is powered by Aston's 5.2-litre V12 engine that, thanks to modified air and ignition pathways together with a seven percent increase in maximum turoboost pressure, results in 770PS (760bhp) and a colossal 664lb ft of torque giving the car a top speed of 211mph.

Power is fed through a ZF eight-speed automatic transmission that's been given a unique calibration to improve shift speeds.

Front end lateral stiffness has been improved by 25 percent to provide maximum performance feel and response. This increase has been achieved with an enhanced front cross member, and a thicker rear undertray, which also increases global torsional stiffness by three percent for perfectly balanced driving dynamics.

Enhancements have also been made to the car's adaptive damping system with the DBS 770 Ultimate's suspension receiving a unique software update that focuses on control and composure without compromising ride quality.

Externally, the clamshell bonnet features a new 'horse-shoe' engine grille while the front splitter integrates two new outboard vents. Further design changes include a carbon fibre cantrail, windscreen surround, mirror caps, and a bumper louvre as standard. There's also a new carbon fibre sill element to help visually lower the side profile while a unique rear diffuser maintains aerodynamic balance between the front and rear.

ASTON MARTIN
DBS 770 ULTIMATE

The DBS 770 Ultimate is further distinguished by new 21in wheels available in three finishes; satin silver, satin black or optional satin black with a diamond-turned finish.

The interior features sports seats trimmed in full semi-aniline leather and Alcantara that features a 'fluted' quilt and perforation pattern as standard. The DBS 770 Ultimate logo is then laser-etched into the centre armrest.

Finally, the car is fitted with a unique set of sill plaques showcasing the famed Aston Martin wings, DBS 770 Ultimate logo and limited-edition numbering signifying the vehicle being one of 300 coupes or 199 Volantes.

Aston Martin's chief technology officer, Roberto Fedeli, said of the car, "When an iconic model generation reaches the end of production it is important to mark the occasion with something special. In the case of the DBS 770 Ultimate, we have spared nothing in ensuring the final version of our current series production flagship is the best-ever in every respect. Not only is it the fastest and most powerful DBS in our history, thanks to a comprehensive suite of improvements to the transmission, steering, suspension, and underbody structure; it is also the best to drive."

Production of the DBS 770 Ultimate is due to commence in the first quarter of 2023, with first deliveries scheduled to begin later in the year.

VANTAGE WINS CLASS AT DAYTONA

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THE HEART OF RACING

L-R: Class-winning drivers, Marco Sørensen, Ian James, Roman De Angelis, and Darren Turner

The Heart of Racing IMSA team has given Aston Martin its first victory in the Rolex 24 at Daytona when drivers Roman De Angelis, Ian James, Darren Turner and Marco Sørensen took GTD class honours in a Vantage.

So competitive was the car that the Heart of Racing was also the first GT car to finish the race. Plus, with another Vantage team, Magnus Racing, finishing second in GTD and the third GT car home, it was a double podium finish for Aston Martin.

With the focus firmly on making it through the night unscathed, in a race that is notorious for high attrition, both GTD Vantages started steadily with James (Heart of Racing) and John Potter (Magnus Racing) staying out of trouble in the early running. But strong stints ensured both cars were firmly established in the top five by the evening.

Heart of Racing was never out of the top three throughout the long night and, for a long period until about two hours before dawn, the team's GTD Pro class entry also led its class before running into technical issues.

Magnus Racing's car became a victory threat as dawn broke and the race reached its climax. Excellent performances from De Angelis and Turner (who can now add a Rolex 24 victory to his tally of three Le Mans and two Nürburgring class wins), meant the American racing fans were treated to a showdown between FIA World Endurance GT champion Sørensen and his former teammate Nicki Thiim, now a rival in the Magnus Racing car.

The last hour was interrupted several times by caution periods, but Sørensen held his nerve as he and Thiim crossed the line just 5.3 seconds apart at the finish.

Heart of Racing's team principal and race winner Ian James said, "Words can't do justice to how proud I am of this team and what they've achieved this weekend. To win the Rolex 24 at Daytona is the crowning glory for anyone involved in IMSA and it means the world to all of us to have finally done it.

Winning Daytona as reigning IMSA GTD champions just goes to prove the strength and the talent of the team we've built up at Heart of Racing."

▶

GAYDON INCREASES EMPLOYMENT

Aston Martin is increasing employment at its Gaydon headquarters with the creation of more than 100 jobs in its manufacturing facility as it prepares for its next generation of sports cars.

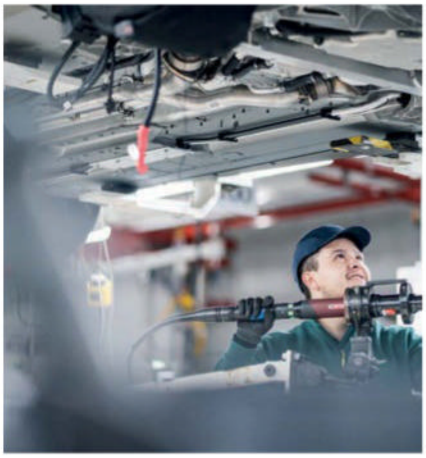
This year will see Aston Martin commence the launch of the highly anticipated future models, which will further enhance its focus on ultra-luxury, high-performance and driving intensity.

More than 100 new automotive technicians are now to be recruited to support production at the British manufacturer's world-class centre for sports car design and engineering.

The recruitment drive will include an offer of full-time permanent employment to agency colleagues currently working at Aston Martin sites on a temporary basis, including those who have supported the ramp-up of DBX707 production in St Athan, Wales, following the successful launch of the model in 2022.

Simon Smith, chief people officer of Aston Martin Lagonda said, "As Aston Martin prepares to ramp-up production and launch the first of our next generation of sports cars, we are delighted to have the opportunity to increase our team at Gaydon as well as offer high-quality permanent employment opportunities for our valued agency colleagues.

Nobody builds an Aston Martin on their own and this is a fantastic opportunity for experienced automotive technicians to join our world-class team and play their part in this exciting next chapter in Aston Martin's rich history."



VANTAGE GT3 HEADS TO PIKES PEAK

A British firm, Venture Engineering, has announced the first entry of an Aston Martin race car for the famed Pikes Peak International Hill Climb in Colorado, in the US, that will take place on 25 June this year. As a partner team of Aston Martin Racing, the engineering firm has experience in many other racing categories while its 2023 Pikes Peak entry sees Robin Shute at the wheel, the first Briton to win the International Hill Climb and a three-time overall winner.

"We're excited to push the limits of the incredibly successful Vantage GT3 in a new racing discipline," said Andy Williamson, commercial director at Venture Engineering. "We also look forward to working with our technical partners over the coming months and years to develop this project into a winning entry."

The contender will be based on the Vantage GT3 race car and powered by the same 4.0-litre turbocharged V8 engine which has been optimised by Aston Martin Racing in conjunction with Venture specifically for the challenge of Pikes Peak. Additional technical developments will include engine mapping, damper work, an upgraded aero bodykit and reduced weight package from existing and development parts, as well as bespoke gearing.

Huw Tasker, head of Aston Martin Partner Racing said, "This is an exciting, adventurous and challenging project that Venture is undertaking and we are looking forward to seeing how it progresses, and to assisting them in achieving their ambitions. It will be great to see Venture take on Pikes Peak in an Aston Martin."

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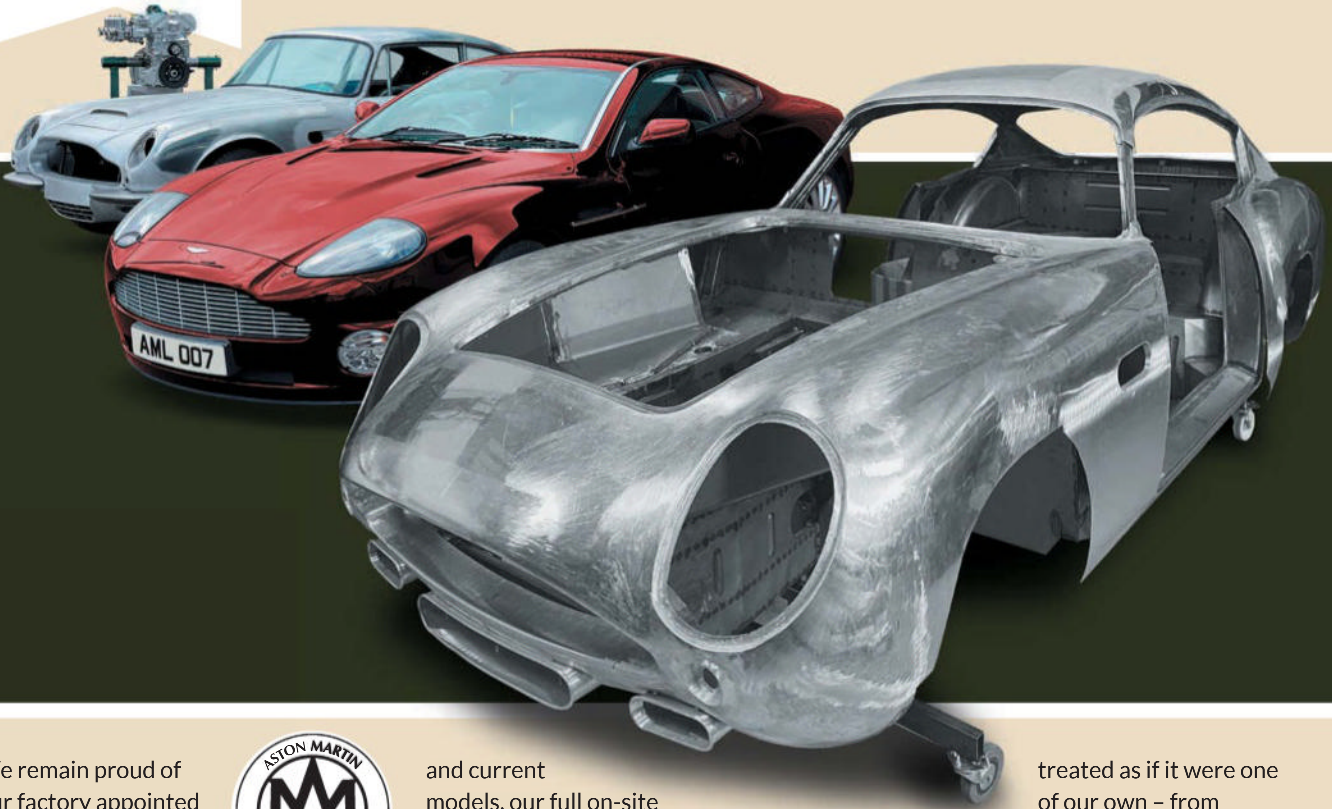

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ASTON'S 110TH BIRTHDAY

This year marks Aston Martin's 110th anniversary which is set to be celebrated through the launch of a new, strictly limited, exclusive model, to be unveiled later in 2023.

The milestone anniversary will also take centre stage at this year's British Grand Prix at Silverstone, Goodwood Festival of Speed, Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and other major events across Aston Martin's key regions, as part of a global marketing campaign entitled 'Intensity: 110 Years in the Making'.

Amedeo Felisa, chief executive officer of Aston Martin Lagonda, said, "In 1913 Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford came together with a shared vision of racing cars and using learnings from the racetrack to push the boundaries of automotive innovation.

"110 years and a little over 110,000 cars later, that spirit continues. Our 110th year promises to be just as exciting as our first, as we turn a new chapter in Aston Martin history with the launch of our next generation of sports cars and the reveal of an extraordinary special model later this year that will celebrate this unique milestone."

The 110th anniversary is one of several notable landmarks for Aston Martin in 2023, with the year also marking 75 years of the DB bloodline, 60 years of the iconic DB5 model and 20 years of Aston Martin's Gaydon headquarters.

ASTON WORKSHOP'S GRAVITY RACE

Leading marque specialist, Aston Workshop, based in the North East of England, has revealed details of its 2023 open day.

To be held on Sunday, 6 August 2023, not only will there be a timeline of cars representing Aston's long history plus an autojumble and live workshop demonstrations, but an inaugural soapbox downhill gravity race. The team with the fastest outright time over the 500m course will be crowned the winner while prizes will also be awarded to the team that records the highest top speed plus a judges' choice prize.

For anyone interested in entering the race, please email thehill@aston.co.uk or for more information visit www.aston.co.uk/thehill

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2003 DB7 GT 5.9
Engine: 5,935cc V12
Power: 435bhp
Torque: 410lb ft
0-60mph: 4.8secs
Max speed: 185mph
Transmission: 6-spd manual
Weight: 1,622kg
Price new: £104,500
Value now: £40k-£60k

1997 DB7 3.2
Engine: 3,228cc 6-cyl SC
Power: 335bhp
Torque: 360lb ft
0-60mph: 5.5secs
Max speed: 165mph
Transmission: 4-speed auto
Weight: 1,825kg
Price new: £82,500
Value now: £20k-£25k

HISTORY

STAIRWAY TO SEVEN

To mark the 30th anniversary of the DB7's public debut, we look at the car's development and importance to Aston Martin's history before comparing a 3.2 with a late 5.9 GT

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

DUE TO its elegant and handsome design, the DB7 is easily one of the best-looking Aston Martins from the last three decades. It was also – at the time – the company's most successful car and helped the brand to become more affordable and accessible, paving the way for the even higher volume Gaydon-built models.

Yet the DB7 hides a secret – from the engine to the body, the chassis to the suspension, the car shares more than a little DNA with another manufacturer. Its development took over a decade and the car only became an Aston Martin at the last minute due to a secret, backroom agreement.

To mark 30 years since the debut of this landmark car, we're looking at its complicated gestation before trying two beautiful but very different models.

Judging by our own 1997 3.2 that we've assembled with a late 5.9 GT from 2003, the DB7 looks every inch the Aston Martin. The soft curves, long bonnet and perfectly balanced proportions all hint at those that came before it, making the car a fitting tribute to the earlier models with the famed DB name.

Yet its origins don't go back to Newport Pagnell but rather Coventry and Jaguar's Browns Lane design studio. In the early Eighties, the British company needed funding from parent company, Leyland, to finish developing its new saloon (the eventual XJ40). Jaguar's then engineering director, Jim Randle, quickly realised its chances of securing the cash injection would be improved if a sports car was developed using the same chassis and drivetrain.He asked Jaguar's studio team to design something appropriate, leaving it to the company's founder, Sir William Lyons, to choose the winner.

The one he pointed his stick at was by a young, South African designer, Keith Helfet, who had only joined the company in 1978. With him unashamedly influenced by Jaguar's past cars – the D- and E-types especially – it featured similarly soft lines to both. "For me, the origami [more commonly known as 'wedge'] styling fashion from the mid-Seventies to the early Eighties was completely unappealing. I don't do lines, I don't do square lines; I do flowing sculpture and that's what Jaguars are about," Keith explained to me during a 2018 interview about the car.

In mid-1980, Jim Randle presented the business case for the saloon and sports car to the BL board in the ballroom of London's Grosvenor Hotel and Keith was there to talk through his sketches. "It was my first taste of corporate glamour," he says. Approval was given in February 1981, as was the required £80 million that kicked off the project. After Keith worked alongside Sir William himself to define the design (internally known as the XJ41), by the mid-Eighties three full-size running prototypes in open, closed and targa styles had been built by the German coachbuilder, Karmann. At this point, the project was still moving towards its original 1986 launch date, having been added to Jaguar's official product plan in 1982.

It was to use Jaguar's all-new AJ6 engine, which was later turbocharged, resulting in 330bhp. That was an impressive figure for the mid-Eighties when a Porsche 911 Turbo had 280bhp. Four-wheel drive – which by the mid-Eighties was becoming more popular – was also later added.

But these additions meant the car was becoming too heavy, too complicated and its development costs were too high. These issues, coupled with the fact that Jaguar's new owner, Ford, wasn't interested in the car because it had been started before it took control, resulted in the programme being cancelled in 1989.

Yet Keith didn't give up on the XJ41 and worked on another, cheaper way to see it put into production. "A few months later, I went to see Jim and said with the same wheelbase and same track width, plus the A-posts in the same place, you could put the body on the XJ-S platform. He took ▶

my proposal to JaguarSport [a separate company owned 50/50 by Jaguar and TWR to build sportier models] and, at the board meeting, Tom Walkinshaw said, 'We could build that.'"

Although now called Project XX and under Walkinshaw's control, it was still a Jaguar product and Keith remembers writing a brief on behalf of the studio director at the time, Geoff Lawson, explaining what could and couldn't change to the design.

But, unbeknown to Keith, Jim and everyone else at Jaguar, Walkinshaw approached Ford with an idea; if the car was rebadged as an Aston Martin (also owned by the American giant) it could be sold for a much higher purchase price. Unsurprisingly, Ford's executives agreed.

Despite the change in branding, the car's specification – including the Jaguar chassis and engine – were kept. Although the design was largely left alone, it was subtly transformed into an Aston Martin by TWR designer, Ian Callum. The Scot had joined Walkinshaw in 1991 after 11 years at Ford and Ghia where he'd worked on the Escort RS Cosworth and RS200 plus several show cars. This, though, would be his first full design.

"I hadn't done a complete car on my own before, without anybody saying, 'Well, that's rubbish, you have to change that,'" said Callum in Andrew Noakes's 2006 book,

Aston Martin DB7: The Complete Story. "You haven't got bosses coming in every two days saying, 'I hate that, I don't like that.' My only judge was me and that's quite a steep learning curve."

One of the major changes Callum made was the addition of the traditional Aston radiator grille, spending time analysing the shape of previous models. "The grille was fascinating," continued the Scot in Noakes's book. "I've grown to really understand what an Aston grille is."

The position of the radiator opening was vital, too, and Callum experimented with height. "The first grilles were actually too low and I had to try their position up and down, up and down..." The other major change he made to the design was to pull the screen further forwards.

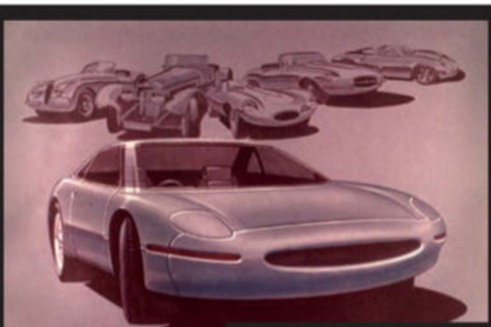
As mentioned earlier, the Jaguar straight-six was retained rather than a new V12 that was currently under development by Ford. "Walter Hayes [Aston Martin's then chairman] wanted a six," said Callum in *The Complete Story*. "He had a price bracket in mind and the V12, I think, was just too expensive."

Even an outsourced six-cylinder also fitted with Hayes's view that the car was the true successor to the iconic Aston Martins of the Sixties that were all powered by the famous twin-cam straight-six. "I very much wanted an engine that carried on DB-ism," Hayes said in a 1993 interview. "We were continuing a distinguished heritage. If you don't respect the heritage you should go and work for someone else." But it wasn't the same turbocharged version that was originally fitted to the XJ41 project in the Eighties. Hayes was instead keen on using a supercharger by the American power specialist, Eaton, that Ford already had experience with for the sixth-generation Thunderbird from 1989. When added to a 3,228cc version of the Jaguar straight-six, it produced 335bhp, 112bhp more than the normally aspirated 4.0-litre version of the engine fitted to the XJS from 1991.

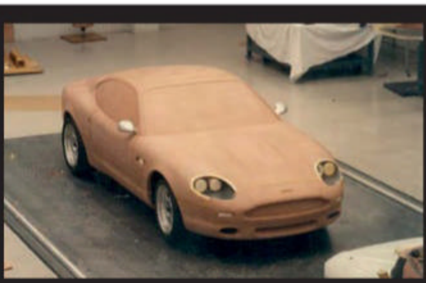
It was soon found that the engine sat too high and was proud of the bonnet line. Since a power bulge was considered too Jaguar-like, the only solution was to drop the motor, achieved by redesigning the front subframe, which carried both the suspension and engine mounts. After heavy lobbying from Callum, the rear suspension was also modified to

▶

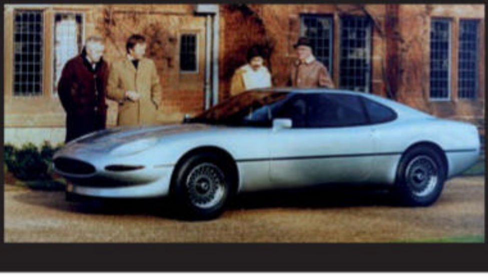
TIMELINE



◀ Keith Helfet's original sketch for the XJ41 project from 1980



A clay model of the ▶ now Aston Martin-led Project NPX in the early Nineties



A full-size mock-up ▶ of the XJ41 outside Wappenbury Hall, the home of Jaguar's Sir William Lyons (far right, next to Keith Helfet) in 1982

▲ The DB7's debut at the Geneva Motor Show in March 1993 improve the car's stance. As a result of being produced in a hurry and under a tight budget, many of the car's minor components were raided from Ford's growing parts bin that included Mazda 323 rear lights since they matched the kind of curve Callum needed to minimise rear overhang. "I wish we'd had the money to do individual lamps," admitted Callum in *The Complete Story*, "but they're behind frames so you don't recognise them."

Since Walter Hayes wanted chromed door handles, these too came from Mazda, because the 323 estate was the only car Walkinshaw's team of engineers could find that featured this rather old-fashioned finish. Finally, much of the interior's switchgear came from Ford while Jaguar supplied the electric seat controls and instrument panel.

"All manufacturers obtain components from outside suppliers," defended Walkinshaw about this heavy parts recycling during an interview in the June 1993 issue of *Automobile Magazine*. "It's ridiculous to spend a fortune designing something like an airbag system when we can get one off the shelf from Jaguar. There was never any talk of designing a car that was brand new from the ground up. It was essential to use components available within the Ford family."

To save weight and increase production times, the bonnet, bumpers, sill, bootlid and roof panel were originally all made from a plastic-type composite material. "Doing it the old Aston Martin way would have been impossibly expensive for the sort of car the DB7 has to be," explained the company's operations director, Nick Fry, to *Automobile* Magazine. "For instance, it takes 25 worker hours to make just one front fender in hand formed aluminium."

Yet despite its mixed parentage and money saving, the result was still a handsome and beautifully proportioned coupe that looked every inch the Aston Martin. The fact that it was named DB7, forever linking it to the classic David Brown era of cars, no doubt helped this. "I was nervous about calling it a DB7 because it seemed a huge presumption to go back and pinch David Brown's name," admitted Hayes in an interview at the time. "But he was over the moon about it."

When the project became an Aston Martin it was renamed NPX for Newport Pagnell Experimental but the car had little

TIMELINE

▲ **Production of the car started at Aston Martin Oxford in Bloxham in September 1994**

▲ **In 1999 the V12 version replaced the 3.2 and featured a slightly redesigned nose**

◀ **A handsome DB7 Volante joined the coupe in 1996**

to do with the company's historical home. It was instead developed and later built at JaguarSport's Bloxham facility where the XJ220 had been built between 1992 and 1994. "We couldn't have built the DB7 in Newport Pagnell," admitted Walter Hayes during a 1994 interview. "There isn't room for it. I discovered Jaguar had no plans for the Bloxham factory once the XJ220 production is finished. I said, 'Can we have it?' and they said, 'Yes'."

Renamed Aston Martin Oxford, it was more of an assembly plant since little of the car was actually made there. The chassis were still produced by Jaguar's Castle Bromwich facility and transported down the road to Bloxham where they were fitted with bodyshells by Motor Panels that was also based in Coventry. The original composite panels were supplied by a third-party specialist.

The completed shells were initially shipped to Rolls-Royce's factory in Crewe for painting, but a paint shop was later opened at Bloxham meaning this was done on site.

A Coventry-based upholsterer, Callow & Maddox Ltd, was initially responsible for the interior, but this was also taken back in-house when the interiors were later made at Aston's main Newport Pagnell facility before being sent the 35 miles to Bloxham for final assembly and fitting.

It took around four weeks to paint, build and quality-control a DB7 and although not quite as handbuilt as the pre-existing V8 models, no robots were used either and the production line was hands-on with no automated track.

Incredibly, the DB7 made its debut at the 1993 Geneva Motor Show in March, a mere two years after Project NPX had started. Despite many other new models being announced at the same time, the Aston was the star of the show. "What a stunning car," was Jeremy Clarkson's view as he stood on Aston Martin's show stand during an episode of *Top Gear*.

Although the car's £78,500 price tag made it £38k more expensive than the XJS 6.0 V12 and £6,000 over the Porsche 928 GT, it was £100k less than the Vantage. This relative cheapness opened up the car and Aston Martin to a wider audience than any of the previous labour-intensive and more expensive models. "You will have little problem convincing yourself of its value," said *Autocar* in its 19 October 1994 issue.

Following further development, the DB7 didn't reach production until September 1994 when the press finally got their hands on the car. Thankfully, the reports were largely complimentary. "Even without the emotional knee-jerk reaction to a car of ▶

BN03 BCU
H5 HYP

such beauty," continued *Autocar's* 1994 test, "the DB7 is a triumph. In nigh-on every area of engine and chassis performance it has what it takes to hold its own against the opposition and, in many spheres, shows them the way home."

Judging by our 1997 example, that's still the case. Its smooth lines haven't dated as much as other cars of the era including the angular BMW 8-Series that I tested in the previous issue of *AMD* or the 993-generation of Porsche 911 and it remains one of the best-looking cars from the Nineties to have been designed and produced in this country. Even the outsourced lights and handles don't bother me. That's not something that can be said about the interior. Although the leather and veneer tick all the right boxes for an £80k car, the obviously Ford Fiesta-sourced switchgear and glued-on veneer cheapens its appearance.

The Jaguar-sourced straight-six might have been older than the invention of the wheel when the DB7 arrived in 1993, but with 335bhp, it still feels strong and powerful. But with our example fitted with a four-speed automatic gearbox that lacks the responsiveness of the five-speed manual that was also available, the engine needs to be constantly worked hard to get the best from it. Plus, the gruff roar of the engine mixed with the scream of the supercharger means the cockpit is louder than a steel factory, further adding to the impression that the DB7 is older than it is. Although, as mentioned earlier, the first examples had composite panels, these were replaced in 1996 by traditional steel versions, which saw the DB7's weight rise from 1,725 to the 1,825kg of this example. You're always aware of the car's bulk and it lacks the agility of lighter rivals such as the Porsche 911 and Ferrari 355.

To give the Aston a little credit, the steering is sharp and accurate while the nicely damped suspension helps the car remain composed but not at the expense of ride and comfort.

Although not a perfect car, the DB7 3.2 is still a likable one and it's easy to understand why 2,473 were built. But other than the introduction of the pretty Volante in 1996 and a few limited editions, it wasn't updated until 1999 when the 3.2 was replaced by the V12-powered Vantage.

This 5.9-litre was a Ford unit that started life as an after-hours project by the company's engineering team in Dearborn, USA. Conceptually, it was two 3.0-litre Duratec V6s placed end-to-end, but with a new head and block by Cosworth (that would build the production engine) plus improved cooling.

It was originally imagined that the engine would power the DB7 and the Lagonda Vignale (a concept which debuted at the 1993 Geneva Show, but which never reached production - see page 78). It wasn't until 1999 when the DB7 V12 Vantage was revealed at the Geneva Motor Show that the engine finally found a home. With 420bhp resulting in a 185mph top speed and a 0-60mph time of 5.2 seconds, it transformed the compact Aston into an entry-level supercar.

The suspension was beefed up by 15-20 percent and new front wishbones and uprights reduced steering offset, making space for enormous 335mm-ventilated Brembo brake discs. At the rear, a new cruciform-shaped brace was added below the final drive to reduce axle tramp under acceleration.

Physically, the Vantage differed from the 3.2 by a larger radiator grille plus larger intakes required to keep the V12 cool. To make room for these, the indicator and fog lamps were combined, their shape and location apparently inspired by the company's racing cars from the Fifties and Sixties including the DBR1 and DP215.

The bottom of the front valance now formed a deep skirt that lined up with the sill covers along the side of the car, plus there was a new rear valance which included new larger tail pipes and new style of alloys.

The result was a subtle yet successful refresh that helped keep the now six-year-old model relevant for the new millennium. ▶

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With its meaty performance and improved handling, the press was impressed by the new V12 model. "The Vantage is a big step towards putting Aston Martin on the road to greatness," said *Autocar* in its 23 June 1999 issue.

And despite the original £92,500 price tag, it's clear the customers liked it, too, since 4,142 Vantages were produced, split almost 50/50 between coupe and convertible.

Yet this wasn't the end of the DB7's development since Aston revealed the even faster GT in 2002. The V12 was remapped to produce another 15bhp while the torque jumped from 400 to 410lb ft. There was also a racing twin-plate clutch and the six-speed gearbox had shorter throw actions. The ride height was slightly lowered and the suspension bushings beefed up along with revised damper settings and stiffer rack mountings for better feedback.

The result was a harder, faster and more driver-focused Aston that, like a shot of adrenaline, helped the now nine-year-old car turn back the clock. "No question, the GT is the DB7's Rumble in the Jungle, one last convincing stab at greatness before the faded seaside and quiet life beckons," was *Autocar's* opinion in its 26 February 2003 issue. "But hell's bells, it's enough to make you believe growing old will be okay when it finally does happen."

Certainly, like one of those 'before and after' diet adverts, due to the five-spoke alloys, discreet ducktail rear spoiler and aluminium mesh grille, the GT looks much more aggressive than the 3.2 next to it.

The interior is largely the same layout as the older model's but the gearlever and ventilation switchgear are now in aluminium plus the carpet is rich Wilton. But when the GT was launched in 2003, it cost over a hundred grand so it needed these new shiny bits to warrant the high cost. This example has the optional carbon veneer on the dash, which looks much more contemporary than the standard wood veneer.

There's also a bright red starter button on the console that's as exciting to use as it is to look at, the big engine firing immediately when pressed. It takes all of a few hundred yards for me to realise this is a completely different animal to the 3.2. With the V12 much more eager to deliver its power, the acceleration arrives faster and feels significantly – almost frighteningly – harder. With the scream of 12 cylinders filling the cabin, I finally reach down, grab the shiny gearlever and change up.

Two gearboxes were available; a sequential automatic transmission in the GTA and a six-speed manual by Tremec as fitted to this GT model. Offering the right amount of resistance plus short, snappy throws, it aids the car's acceleration more than another 10bhp might.

As I head towards a corner, I flick the lever down into third, gently squeeze the brake pedal, which scrubs off enough speed for me to throw the car confidently into the bend. With the fat 18in Bridgestones finding grip and the beefed-up suspension keeping it calm and composed, I'm able to throw the heavy car into the curve with more confidence than I did the 3.2.

Admittedly, the ride is less compliant than the straight-six's and I can feel more of the road surface through the wheel but it's still a magnificent car. And despite the design's age, it showed what DB7 was truly capable of. When production ended in 2003 after just 302 GTs were made, it did so on a high.

Plus, while the DB7 made Aston more accessible in terms of image and performance, the GT paved the way for the harder, more driver-focused Gaydon-era of cars that followed including the Vanquish and V8 Vantage.

So, while its heritage might be secret, the DB7's importance to the company's history and its continuing capability in either straight-six or V12 form is clear to see. **AMD**

BN03 DCU
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DB7

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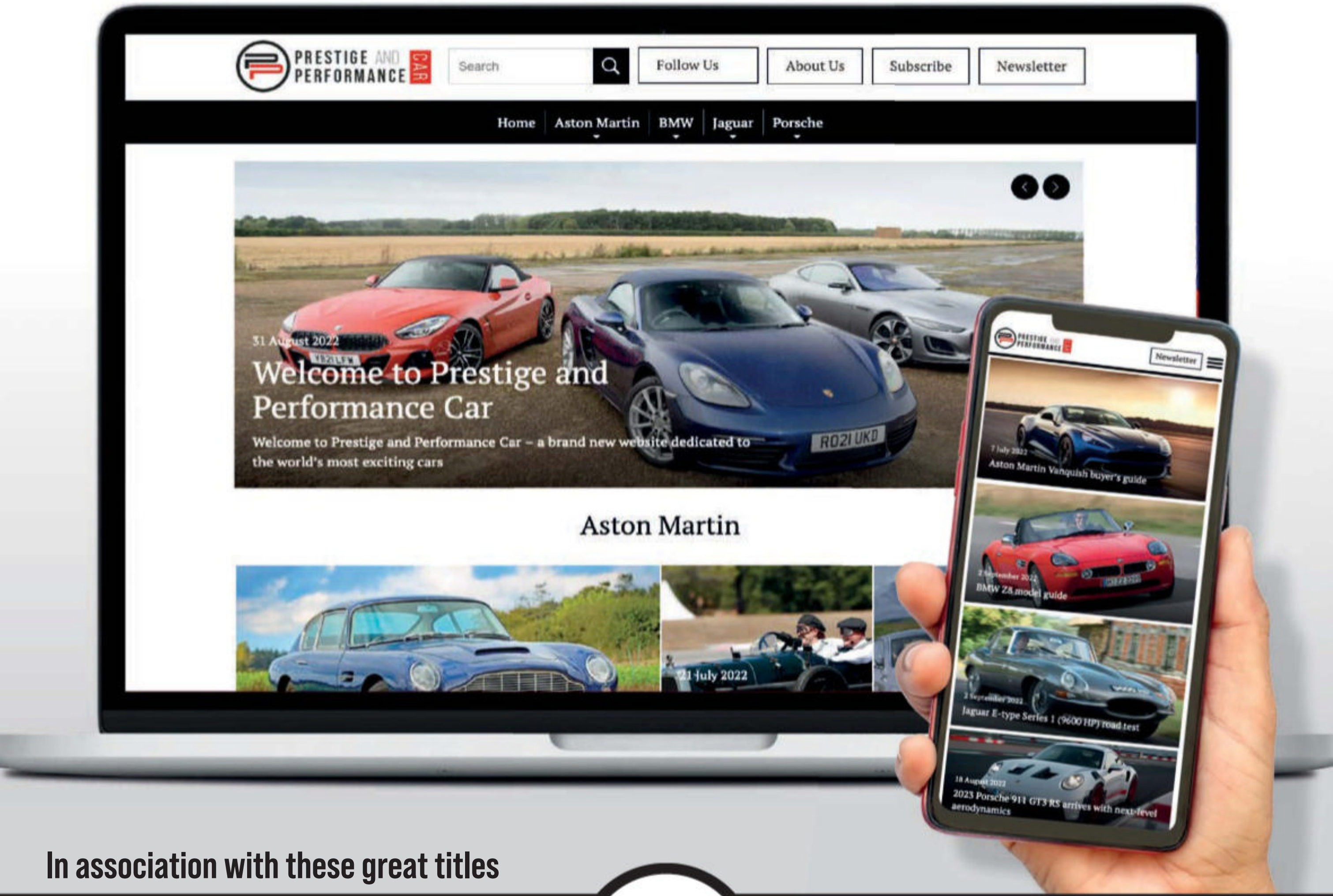
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DBS BUYING GUIDE

Discover what to look for and the costs involved in buying, owning and running a six-cylinder or V8-powered DBS

WORDS ROB HAWKINS **IMAGES** AMD ARCHIVE

MANUFACTURED BETWEEN 1967 and 1972, the first generation of the DBS paved the way for a new style of Aston Martin that became a success well into the Eighties. The American muscle car inspired shape was penned by designer William Towns and wasn't intended to replace the DB6 (the two were produced together until the DB6 ended in January 1971). The original plan was to install an all-aluminium V8 engine, but this had been unreliable at Le Mans in 1967 when installed in a couple of Lola T70s, so it was postponed, and the DBS was launched with the familiar 3,995cc straight-six engine that powered the DB6. It wasn't until the spring of 1970 that the V8 was finally installed and both engines were fitted until the model was revised in 1972 after owner David Brown sold Aston Martin, and available only with a V8, it was renamed the AM V8. Total production of the DBS under David Brown amounted to 803 in six-cylinder ▶

and V8 guises with the Vantage badge offering more performance. And it was only ever available as a four-seater sports saloon – there was no convertible Volante until 1978.

Whether it's a six-cylinder DBS or a V8 (commonly known as a DBS V8), these four-seater fastbacks are now collectable classics, and still offer the looks and performance to match. Motor magazine tested a Vantage-specification six-cylinder DBS for their 21 December 1968 issue, reporting a 0-60mph time of 7.1 seconds and a top speed of 141.5mph. According to the website astonmartins.com, the DBS V8 with a manual gearbox can hit 60mph from stationary in a mere 5.9 seconds and achieve a top speed of 161mph. At the time of manufacture, it was one of the fastest production cars in the world.

The standard of specification is also very impressive for a classic from the Sixties and Seventies. All models had electric windows, disc brakes all round with two servos, a limited-slip differential, power steering, air-conditioning (optional) and either a five-speed manual or three-speed automatic gearbox.

Paul Richards at Richards of England says, "A manual gearbox is much more suited to the six-cylinder, even though you can convert, but sourcing an original manual is much more desirable. The V8 is much happier touring with an automatic gearbox. However, a manual is still the one people want."

PRACTICALITIES

The DBS looks large, and it is, at 4,585mm or a little over 15 feet long and 1,829mm or six feet wide. Surprisingly however, it's marginally smaller than the last of the Ford Mondeos (2015-2022).

Inside a DBS, there is space for four people, but with seatbelts only for the driver and front seat passenger.

With aluminium bodywork and a steel chassis, the DBS is not too heavy at 1,588kg for the six-cylinder and 1,727kg for the V8. Consequently, fuel consumption should be in the teens and 20mpg at best, but as low as 10mpg if you are heavy-footed. With a 21-gallon fuel tank, it's feasible to cover 200-400 miles between refills.

Working on these vehicles requires a selection of imperial AF tools, and lifting equipment such as a two-ton trolley jack and substantial axle stands are required to safely raise and support the vehicle, whether you are changing a wheel, working on the brakes or rust-proofing the underside.

Darren Wood at Aston Service Dorset (ASD) explains that a special tool and a dial gauge are required to set the pre-load on the wheel bearings, although an old driveshaft can be used instead. Otherwise, no special tools are required to work on these vehicles.

VALUES AND COLLECTABLES

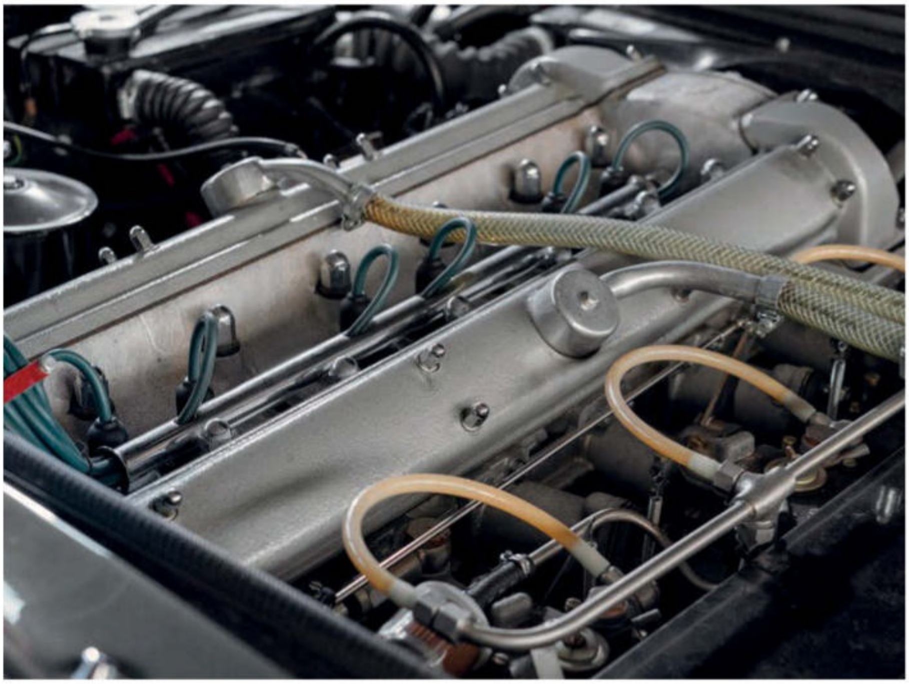
Expect to pay upwards of £100,000 for a DBS in roadworthy condition, but if originality is a must, you may have to pay a higher price for a genuine example. These cars weren't worth much during the Eighties, so an engine swap or a roof chop to turn one into a convertible were not regarded as spoiling the originality. While a DBS with a different engine will probably reduce the value of the car, a Banham convertible is regarded as collectable and potentially more valuable – Paul Banham completed around 30 convertibles in the late Eighties and early Nineties (see issue 4 for a feature on one of them).

The first generation of the DBS (known as the series one or Mk1) features louvres behind the rear side windows to aid airflow through the cabin. This was replaced with a single louvre above the bootlid in 1970 (and is a feature of all DBS V8 models) when the series two or Mk2 appeared. Very early models also had a split front bumper with the registration plate mounted in the middle.

ASTON MARTIN
VAN

The V8 models have a larger front air dam than the six-cylinder models and are only equipped with 15x7in GKN alloy wheels - wire wheels were only fitted to the six-cylinder engine DBS as they were deemed insufficient to handle the power and torque of the V8. According to the website, www.astonmartins.com, 402 DBS V8s were produced between April 1970 and May 1972 before the AM V8 replaced this model.

It goes on to say that the gold DBS featured in the television programme, The Persuaders, which was driven by Roger Moore, was badged up to look like a V8 model along with the GKN wheels that were only fitted to the V8, but it was actually a six-cylinder because demand for the V8 was so great that AML could not supply one for filming.



SIX-CYLINDER

The DBS's all-aluminium six-cylinder engine in standard tune should produce 282bhp at 5,500rpm. It's equipped with a bank of three SU HD 6 carburettors and has an 8.9:1 compression ratio. The Vantage model of the DBS used the same engine, but its compression ratio was raised to 9.4:1, the camshafts were reprofiled to improve performance and triple DCOE Webers replaced the SUs, resulting in a power output of 325bhp at a higher 5,750rpm.

Listen for excessive tappet and timing chain noise, which is often more prominent on high-mileage engines. Check the oil pressure is around 30psi at idle when the engine is warm.

"Check the weep holes on the side of the engine block for oil," says Paul Richards at Richards of England, concerning common oil leaks on this engine. He goes on to say that a common problem is a crack emerging in the engine block near the cylinder liners, which can only be seen once the cylinder head has been removed. Paul says it can sometimes be repaired by laser welding the crack, although in some instances a new engine block is required.

Darren at ASD adds that the six-cylinder engine block is prone to corrosion around the base of the liners. "This can require the block to be sleeved to provide a good ▶

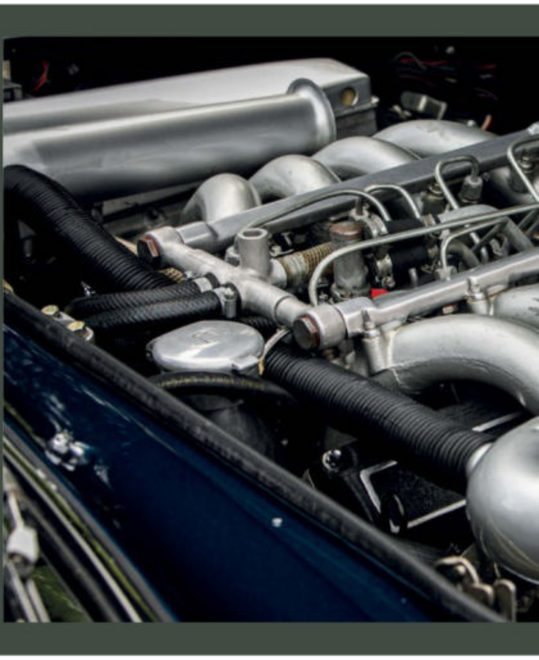
V8

The 5,340cc engine in the DBS V8 consists of an aluminium block and two cylinder heads with a twin overhead camshaft configuration for each. Power output is between 310 and 320bhp, but for the Japanese market, an emissions equipped (EE) V8 produced 250bhp - it had a lower compression ratio of 8.3:1 as opposed to 9:1 and was equipped with an ignition advance/retard system.

Fuelling is provided by a Bosch PES 8KL mechanical injection system and the ignition system uses the Lucas OPUS electronic unit, although the EE engine has a Lucas 35D8 distributor. Paul at Richards of England says the OPUS electronic unit can be problematic, so he often replaces it. As for the fuel injection system, "They can be tricky to set up, and can fall out of balance, especially if the vehicle is not used regularly," he says. "The Bosch pumps are also a known issue, with only a select few specialists able to rebuild them correctly."

Darren at ASD comments that, "The injection system is good if set up correctly and not messed around with, but oil changes on the oil bath on the injection pump often get missed and are essential. Also, the pump should never be adjusted with the engine running because this breaks the pump and requires a rebuild which costs in the region of £3,600 on exchange."

A V8 engine rebuild can cost £25,000-£30,000, and the capacity can be increased to 5.7 litres.



surface for the O-rings on the liners to seal against, which costs £2,500-3,000 to sleeve all six liner registers."

He also says that oil leaks from the rear main oil seal are common (it uses a scroll seal), so look for oil drips from where the engine and gearbox are mated. "We stock an easy-to-fit lip seal conversion which can be fitted during an engine rebuild which eliminates this problem," he says, which costs £277.56.

If an engine rebuild is required, then stretching the capacity to 4.2 litres is a tempting upgrade and not much more expensive than a standard rebuild. Including dyno testing, budget for around £33,000.

TRANSMISSION

A ZF five-speed manual gearbox was fitted throughout the production of the DBS, but an automatic gearbox was also available. For the six-cylinder engine, it was a three-speed BorgWarner BW8, whereas for the V8, it was a Chrysler three-speed TorqueFlite. However, as David at independent specialist Borg Warner Specialist explains, "I have seen people use the BorgWarners in their V8s, so people may have interchanged them over the years." He charges £895 to rebuild a BorgWarner BW8 and £350 for the torque converter.

All models were equipped with a limited-slip differential (LSD), with a 3.54:1 final drive ratio for an automatic gearbox and 3.73:1 for a manual.

Check that the selection of gears on automatics is smooth when changing up and down. On a manual gearbox, listen for the clutch slipping, check the biting point (it's a hydraulically operated clutch) and ensure none of the gears jump out of selection. Gear selection on the ZF may be a little awkward at first when the oil inside is cold, but this should become easier as it quickly warms up – if it doesn't then further investigation is needed.

"The ZF five-speed can suffer from a noisy layshaft when hot and the box is in neutral," says Darren at ASD. "It requires the engine to be tuned to the best it can be and the layshaft shimming to eliminate the chattering sound, although it is almost impossible to get rid of it completely."

In all cases, listen for noises (whirring and clonks) from the gearbox, propshaft and rear axle, which could indicate worn bearings or universal joints and wear inside the differential.

The debate between choosing a manual or automatic gearbox may be resolved by what cars are available and your budget, but if money and availability were not part of the equation, what would you choose? Rupert Keyzar at The Aston Advantage explains, "A DBS Vantage with

a manual gearbox is a stunning car to drive and the best of the six-cylinder DBSs by far, but a manual DBS V8 is something else when properly set up."

WHEELS AND TYRES

The DBS was equipped with 15in wheels for both the six-cylinder and V8. "Like the late DB6, the six-cylinder DBS came fitted with either 815V15 Avon Turbospeed cross-ply tyres or 205R15 Pirelli Cinturato CN72," explains Dougal Cawley at Longstone Classic Tyres. "Generally speaking, Aston Martin in this period fitted Avon as a cross-ply and Pirelli Cinturato as a radial. We recommend the 205VR15 Pirelli Cinturato CN72 for the six-cylinder DBS."

As for the DBS V8, Dougal says, "Low-profile tyres came out in 1968. The DBS V8 came out with GR/70R15 tyres. I also believe it came with the Pirelli CN12, and all the period pictures look like that.

We currently recommend the Michelin 225/70VR15 XWX for a DBS V8. It is smack bang period, and as well as the Pirelli Cinturato CN12, it is what all the other top sports cars of the day fitted - Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini, etc. We have utter faith in the carcass of the Michelin XWX as a fantastic handling tyre on very powerful cars of that period. The 225/70VR15 Avon ACR3A is what the later V8 had fitted, but to me they are a bit more of a comfort tyre and it is only capable of a V speed rating [149mph] whereas the Michelin gets a W [168mph]."

Motor magazine's road test of a DBS Vantage (21 December 1968) comments on having low-profile Avon radials fitted, stating they were, "our favourite covers for wet-road grip. A measure of their adhesion is the staggering 0.97g recorded in a maximum stop from 40mph in the wet – better than many cars manage on a dry surface."

Suffice to say that if you are paying a good price for a DBS, the tyres should all be the same brand and not older than seven years - look for a four-digit date stamp on the sidewall of the tyre, which indicates the week and year they were made (4812 means week 48 in the year 2012).

SUSPENSION

All models feature coil springs all round with wishbones, telescopic dampers and an anti-roll bar at the front, whereas at the rear, there's a De Dion axle with a Watts linkage (four trailing/radius arms) and Armstrong Selectaride lever arm dampers.

"Look at the car from the rear," comments Paul at Richards of England. "You often see DBSs leaning to one side, which is often to do with the set-up at the rear and incorrect bushes being fitted."

During a test drive, listen for clonks from the suspension, which could be caused at the front by worn bushes, or at the rear by a failed lever arm damper or worn bushes for the Watts linkage. If the car can be raised on a ramp or positioned over an inspection pit, visually inspect the coil springs for fractures and excessive corrosion.

If you are at all unsure about the condition of the suspension and whether it needs a thorough overhaul, then costs can soon accumulate, although individual prices are often reasonable. For instance, a replacement bush for the Watts linkage is around £40, but note that there are eight ▶

of them. A complete bush kit for the front suspension costs around £700. Standard lever arm dampers can be overhauled for around £800 for a pair.

Upgrades are available, such as adjustable coilovers for the front suspension and telescopic damper conversions for the rear, both of which cost around £1,000.

BRAKING

Girling discs and calipers are fitted all round with two separate circuits and vacuum-operated servos for the front and rear. The rear brakes are inboard-mounted and while there's an access panel underneath the rear seats, they are awkward to inspect and even more awkward to work on, so if the fly-off handbrake is very poor or there are any issues with the rear brakes, don't assume it will be straightforward to fix. The front brakes can be visually inspected from behind the road wheels, so look for corrosion of the discs. Routine maintenance should see them stripped and cleaned annually to help keep them in working order.

Being a dual-circuit system, Paul at Richards of England warns the brakes can be difficult to bleed and achieve a firm brake pedal, so if the pedal can be pumped to help make it feel firmer, there may be air in the system that needs to be removed.

Parts prices vary – a seal kit for a front brake caliper costs around £80 and a set of pistons costs £230, but excludes the work required to overhaul the caliper, whereas an exchange front caliper costs almost £350. Expect to pay around £365 for a single front brake disc, £75-£95 for a set of front brake pads, £100 for a set of rears and £165 for a set of handbrake pads. A brake servo costs around £360, and there are two of them.

INTERIOR & ELECTRICS

Check the condition of the interior upholstery, looking for fading, tears and marks. Whilst a sagging bolster can be replaced, a damaged piece of exterior leather for instance, may be difficult to source a colour-matched replacement that will blend in with its surroundings. And note that whilst most upholstery is made from leather, cloth interiors may have been fitted at the request of the customer or as a cheap replacement at some point in the car's life.

Test all of the instruments and switches to make sure they work. Missing or inoperative components may be difficult to repair or source, so be wary of a seller who appears confident that an inactive tacho for instance, should be easy to fix – why hasn't it been done?

A single 12-volt battery powers the electrics in a DBS, which has a positive earth connection on the six-cylinder models, but a negative earth on the V8. Exact details are not so clear, but some six-cylinder models were equipped with a dynamo (although some specialists believe all models were fitted with an alternator), but may have been upgraded to an alternator and converted to negative earth electrics (an alternator conversion kit costs around £340).

Paul at Richards of England recommends removing the polished sill covers to inspect the wiring harness that's routed down the sides of the sills. The wiring can turn brittle and become damaged where it exits the sills, resulting in electrical issues.

BODYWORK CORROSION

With a steel framework in which aluminium exterior panels are fitted, corrosion is one of the biggest issues to look for in a DBS. Start by carefully inspecting the paintwork to look for bubbling where corrosion of the aluminium exterior has occurred. This can usually be fixed by rubbing down the affected area to remove the corrosion, then respraying the panel, but this can be costly because a small patch can result in a large area to respray and blend in ▶

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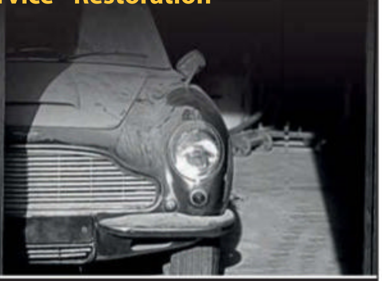

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with the rest of the exterior. Next, look along the edges of the wings, doors and A-pillars for further signs of corrosion. Then move to the sills and check them from underneath and inside the cabin (if sill covers are fitted, check whether they can be removed to look underneath them), tapping along them with the soft handle of a screwdriver to check for a reassuring tinging sound of solid metal. These sections are made from steel and if they are rotten, repair panels are available that cost from £100 to £650 per side, but will undoubtedly cost a lot more to fit and paint.

If possible, look underneath the vehicle to further check the condition of the steelwork that forms the main chassis/platform. Look for corrosion in the two steel box sections routed parallel to the sills and up to the front, where they are connected to the suspension turrets and the front footwells and engine bulkhead.

There's potentially a lot of hidden steel underneath the aluminium exterior, all of which can corrode more dramatically, resulting in a thorough stripdown and overhaul to remove the rot. Such an undertaking will cost several thousands of pounds to complete, and there are only a few steel repair panels, such as Watts linkage mounting brackets for £80 each, so the rest will have to be fabricated.

A similar problem exists with the exterior bodywork, where new panels are few and far between, so if a replacement rear quarter is needed, new old-stock or used items are all that's left, which means prices can be high – we found a used undertray for an early DBS for sale for £1,200.

Paul at Richards of England says that, “Other signs of corrosion are at the bottom of the A-posts around the front screen, often bubbling in this area.” He also recommends checking the bottom of the doors because water passes through them and can sit there, rotting out the door bottoms and getting between that and the aluminium skin, resulting in bubbling. “The bottom flange of the front wings and rear wings that rivet to the outer sill (behind the polished sill) often oxidise and crumble away,” he says. “The wing bottoms can be made and replaced whilst replacing the sills.”

Rupert Keyzar of The Aston Advantage says, “Bubbling of the aluminium body such as around the windscreen and the bases of the wheelarches almost certainly indicates chassis problems of varying degrees. A clean-looking car can hide many issues and a tired-looking car can actually be quite sound underneath – so you do have to take each car on its own merit.”

DAVID BROWN
ASTON MARTIN

OUR VERDICT

The DBS altered the direction for Aston Martin, steering it towards the status of the large high-performance luxury supercars that became increasingly popular throughout the Seventies and beyond. Whether it's an early six-cylinder or later V8, both offer a level of motoring that was once hard to beat, so if you want a taste of that, a DBS is a worthwhile investment, but choose wisely and ensure you can keep on top of maintenance and repairs.

As Rupert Keyzar of The Aston Advantage says, “Unless the car is being sold through a recognised and reputable Aston Martin specialist, always get a pre-purchase inspection first. A shiny body and a clean interior sway many potential buyers, but the majority of problems are always underneath.”

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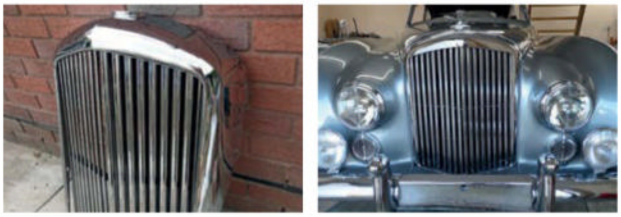

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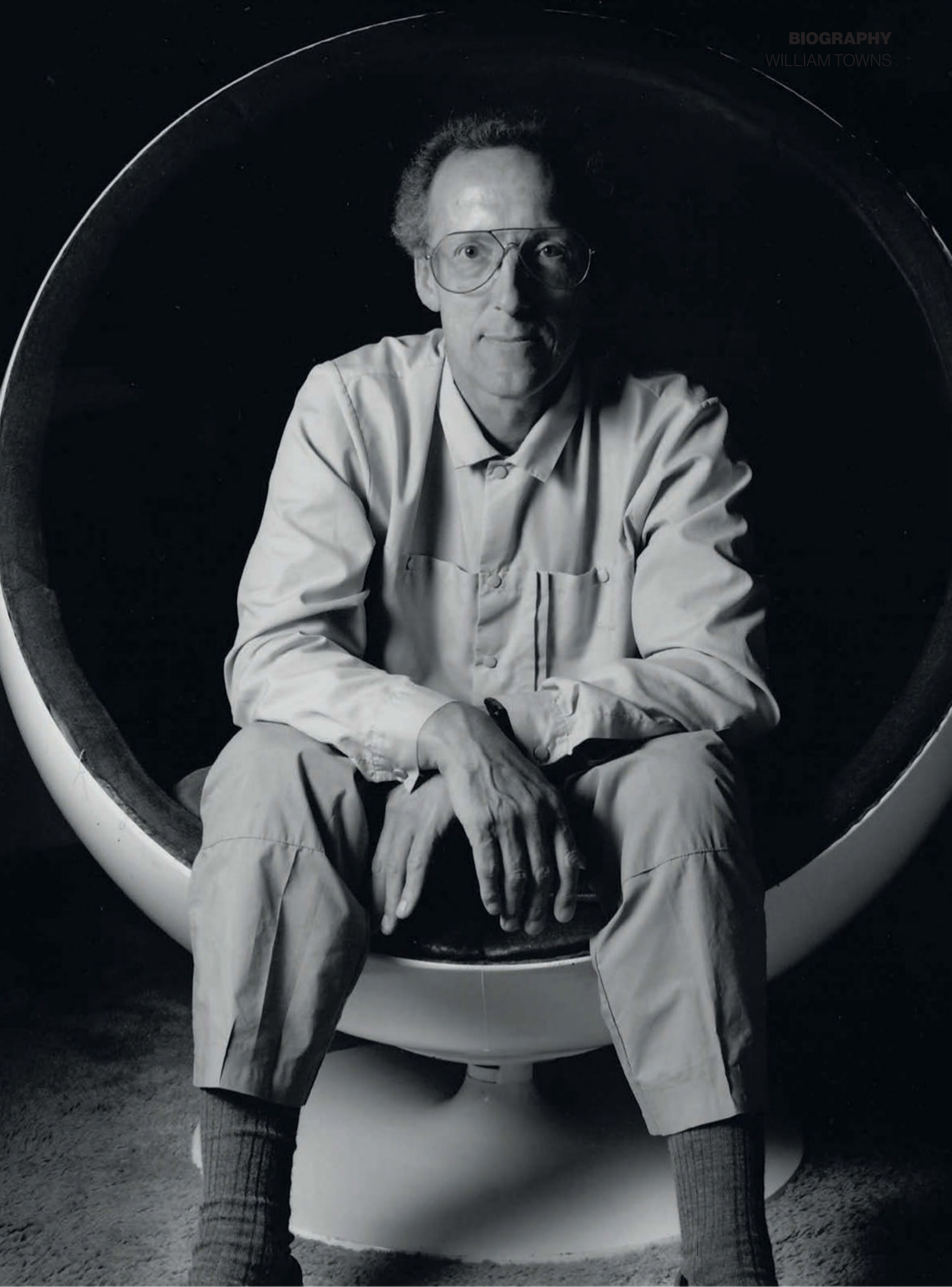
BIOGRAPHY

THINK DIFFERENTLY

Designer William Towns was responsible for some of Aston Martin's most memorable models, including the DBS, Lagonda Series 2 and Bulldog prototype. To mark the 30th anniversary of Towns' passing, we look at his life, career and the many innovative cars he created

WORDS MIKE TAYLOR **IMAGES** AMD ARCHIVE



BORN IN 1936 in Kingston upon Thames, today the name of William Towns is best remembered for his work with Aston Martin Lagonda, including the futuristic wedge-shaped saloon and the outrageous Bulldog, while his micro cars were years ahead of their time. He was quite simply unique in his field.

After attending boarding and public schools (where he probably polished his charismatic accent and sense of style, remembers his widow, Lizzie), William began his career in 1954 as an apprentice at The Rootes Group car company in Coventry. Training was an especially rounded process with time served in engineering, business administration and even the finance departments, apprentices then specialising towards the end of their training for their chosen career path within the company. In William's case, it provided valuable engineering experience while his overwhelming passion for design saw him work alongside future styling notables

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▲ **He also helped with the design of the BRM-Rover turbine car as seen here at the 1965 Le Mans 24 Hours**

The first Aston ▶ Martin designed by William Towns was the DBS from 1967

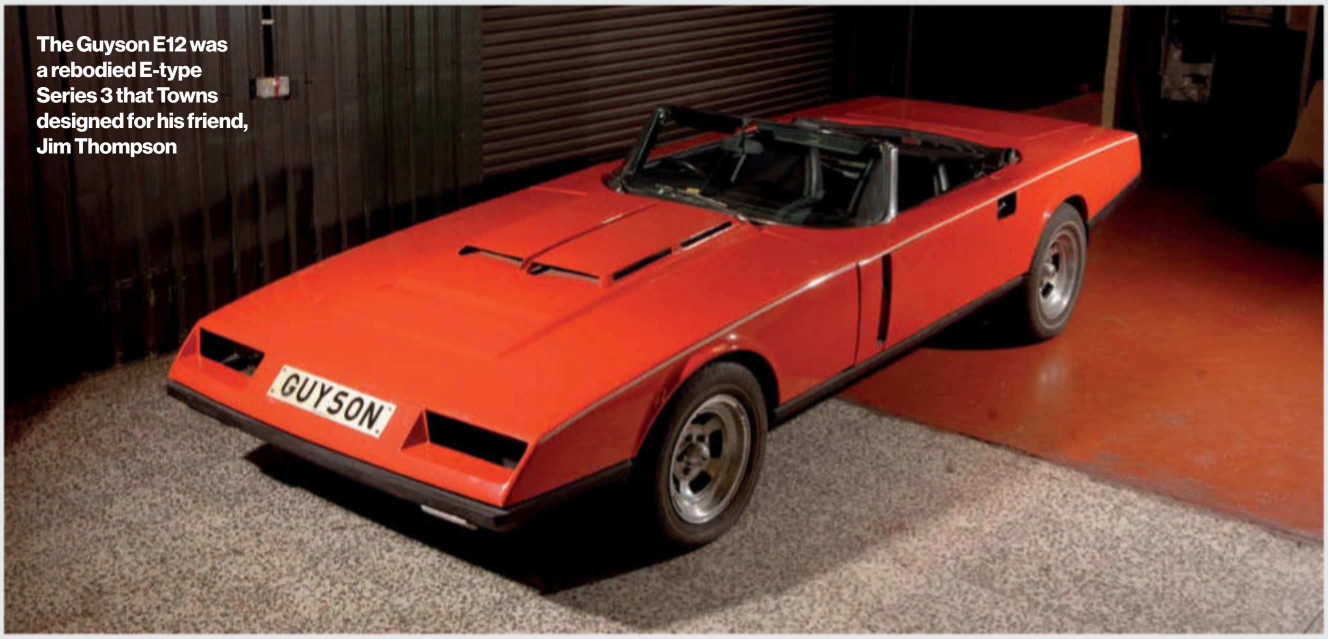
such as Peter Stevens and Roy Axe in the Humber Road design studios (under design supremo Ted White), where he focused on shaping items such as seats and door handles for the next generation of Rootes' cars such as the Hillman Hunter. William recalled once that he'd always been passionate about vehicles since he discovered the wheel aged around two.

By the early Sixties, however, Rootes was beginning to feel the trauma of financial tremors and in 1963, William moved to Rover. There, he worked for David Bache, becoming involved with the elegant 2000 saloon, and later, the unique Rover-BRM gas turbine car programme. Rover's considerable experience with gas turbine engines led to their decision to enter a specially developed car in the 1963 Le Mans, where as a 'special' it was unplaced, but comparison with a conventional internal combustion engine machine put it in eighth place. For the 1965 race, the company gave the car a pretty closed coupe body designed by William.

In 1966, William married his gifted artistic girlfriend Lizzie and was persuaded by Aston Martin's chief designer, Harold Beach, to join the company initially as a seat designer.

David Brown, the then owner of the company, was anxious to introduce a new all-alloy V8 engine and a modern bodyshell to take it, replacing the ageing DB6 model. A Harold Beach-designed chassis had been sent to Carrozzeria Touring Superleggera in Milan to work up into a proposal for a two-door four-seater coupe, while by 1965 Polish engineer, Tadek Marek, had designed a new all-alloy V8 engine. The following year, Touring made two prototype show cars and presented them on their stand at the Paris Salon, though their reception was not encouraging. Sadly, the company's finances gave rise for concern and in January 1967 Touring ceased trading,

Towns was involved with the design of the Rover 2000 from 1963


The Guyson E12 was a rebodied E-type Series 3 that Towns designed for his friend, Jim Thompson

▶

so the projects were cancelled. William suggested to David Brown to let him produce a styling concept vehicle instead. The company's studio at the time was simply a tiny area allocated within the factory floor, created by blocking off some space with wardrobe panels. William shaped a sleekly elegant two-door coupe with an aggressively angled front and gracefully sloping rear. It was eventually called the DBS after the Touring-designed project.

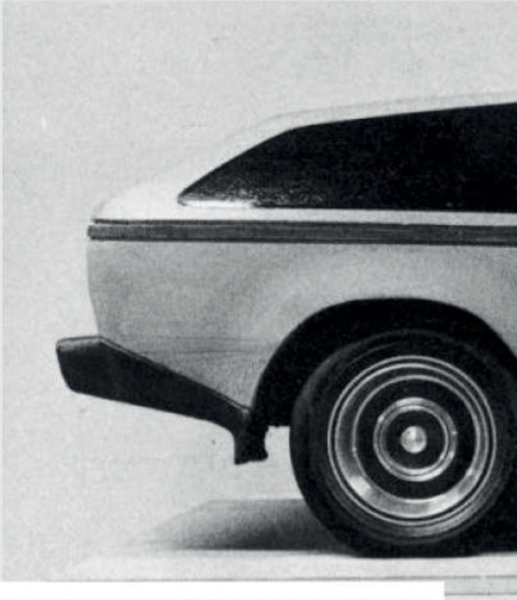
Brown, impressed with the proposal, requested the car be lengthened and made into a luxury high-performance four-door saloon which would be entitled Lagonda. However, the Tadek Marek-designed V8 engine was still yet months away from production, so the coupe went to the public with the 3,995cc straight-six power unit instead. It was unveiled to a receptive public at Blenheim Palace in September 1967. Arguably, it was the turning point in William's career.

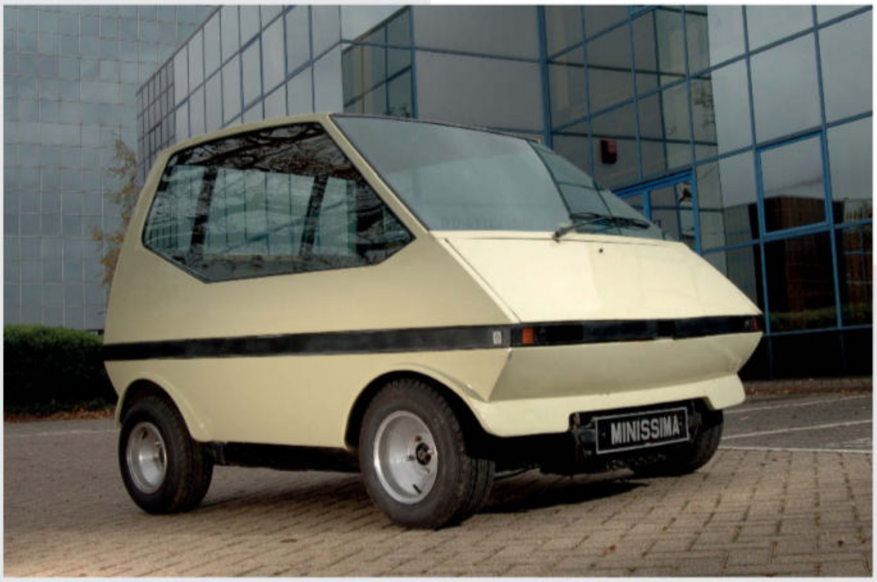
One DBS-based Lagonda was produced in 1969 that was powered by a unique 5.0-litre version of the forthcoming V8. With the wheelbase around a foot longer than the standard coupe, it was used by David Brown as his personal transport for several years.

However, unable to envision a permanent future at Aston Martin ("You can never guarantee continued employment as a freelancer with regular design tasks," he once declared), in 1968, William left to join an ex-Rover colleague, who had set up a small design business. Sadly, this very quickly folded and William together with Lizzie set up their own design/prototype build facility located in a grandiose studio in Moreton-in-Marsh where they lived. Called Interstyle, Lizzie explained later that, "We picked up a contract from the failed partnership and then another commission came along and we just ticked along like that. Then, unexpectedly, we received a contract from the Westwood Mower Company."

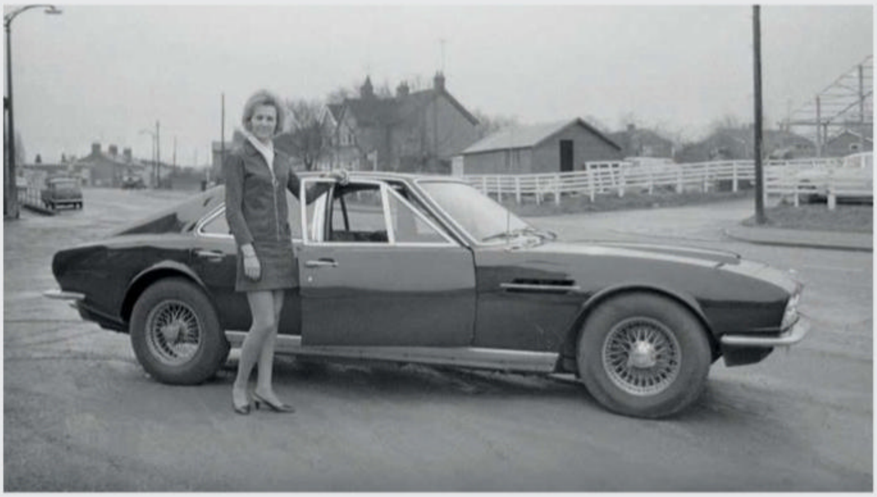
This work caused William's mind to think small. Minissima was a Mini-based concept for a city car and was radical not only for its tiny footprint, but also for the fact that it had a single side-hinged rear door so the car could be reversed at right angles up to the pavement and the occupants could climb out. The prototype was displayed at the 1973 Earls Court Motor Show. The concept was later sold and reworked as a Design Council Award-winning vehicle to take wheelchairs.

By the launch of the reworked Aston Martin V8 model in 1972, William had become involved with British Leyland, taking on the design of the Triumph Puma, part of a Triumph/Rover programme to develop the next generation of large saloons. Inevitably, he was affected by the big company Triumph/Rover politics which ran rife at that time. David Bache had created the P10 five-door hatchback with droopy front styling and a shallow-angled rear, while the second proposal came from Michelotti/Les Moore, based

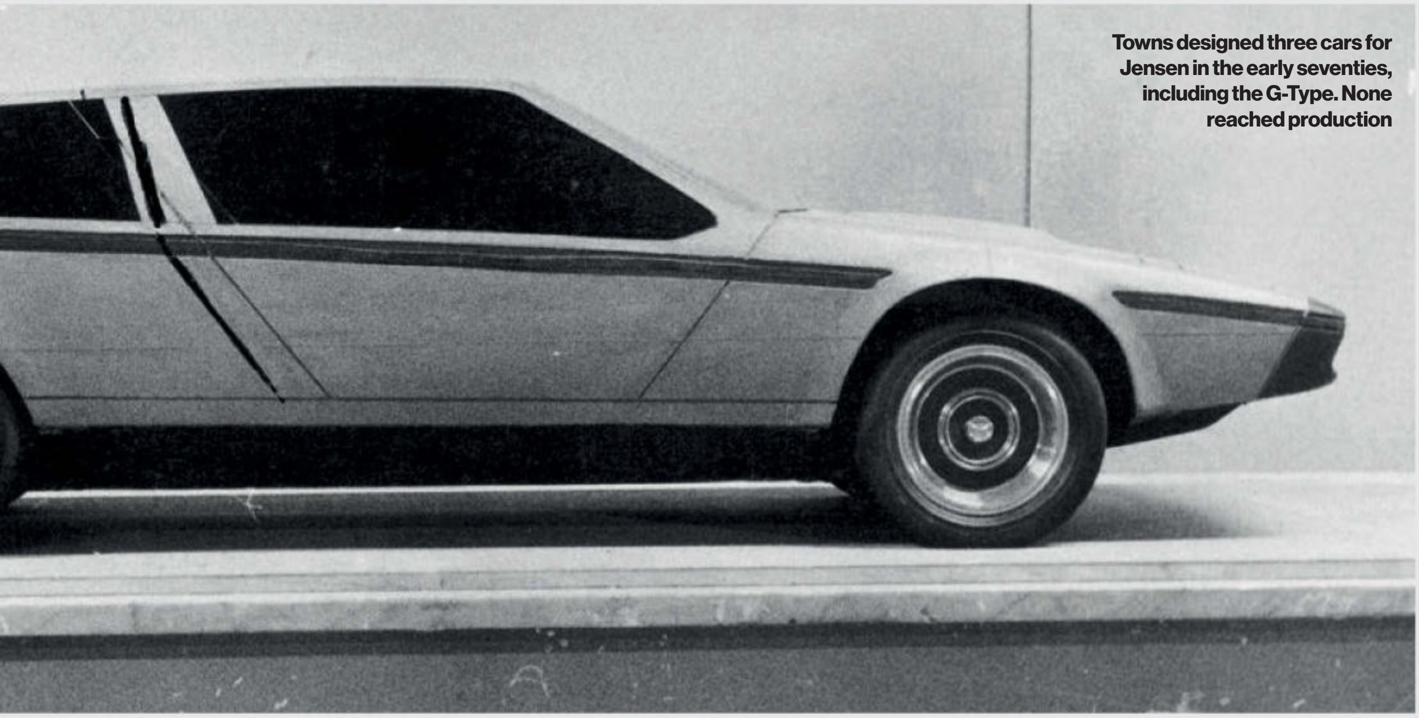




The 1973 Minissima was a tiny Mini-based city car with a single door at the rear



The DBS was later stretched into a four-door Lagonda saloon powered by Aston's V8 and entered limited production in 1974



Towns designed three cars for Jensen in the early seventies, including the G-Type. None reached production

on the earlier Triumph 2000 model range with facelift modifications by William. Senior management selected the Bache shape, which was launched as the SD1. However, fortuitously, William retained his links with BL over other projects.

In 1972, Jim Thompson of Guyson International, a specialist in engineering equipment, crashed his beloved Jaguar E-type Series 3, asking his friend William to effect a repair. What emerged was typically innovative Towns; he removed the damaged panels, adding new GRP skins, which could be removed in the future, if so desired, revealing the original Jaguar bodywork. It featured razor-edge lines while the engine was tuned with Weber carburettors. The established press waxed lyrical over the car and William adapted his own E-type, similarly. Little did he know that he would be undertaking a restyling commission on its successor, the XJ-S, many years later.

The next project would be an altogether different programme, involving a sports car for Jensen Motors Ltd of West Bromwich. Jensen's bread-and-butter revenue came from assembling Austin Healey 3000s and Sunbeam Tigers. When this stopped, it caused a cashflow crisis for the British company. At this point, Californian car salesman, Kjell Qvale (pronounced Shell Cavarlee), stepped in. He badly needed a sports car for the US market and began talks with Donald Healey, who had been appointed as Jensen's new chairman. Together they approached William to take on the task which would lead to three commissions. His sports car solution was a mid-Atlantic design with a slight flick up over the rear wheels, understated wings and

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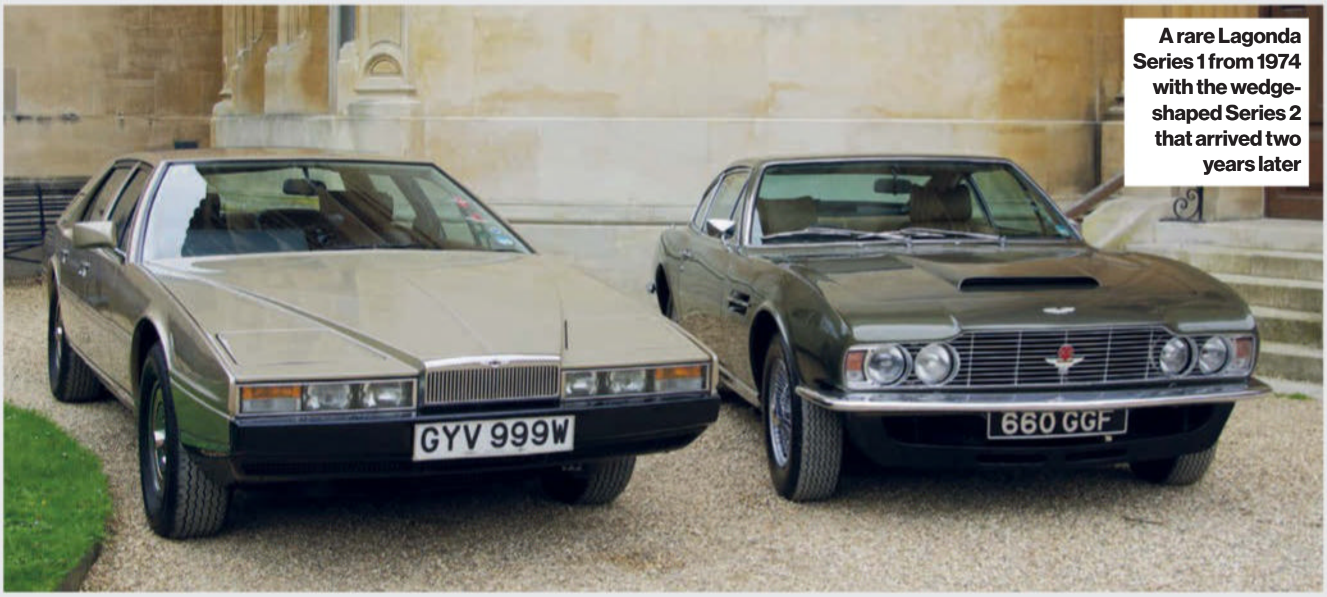
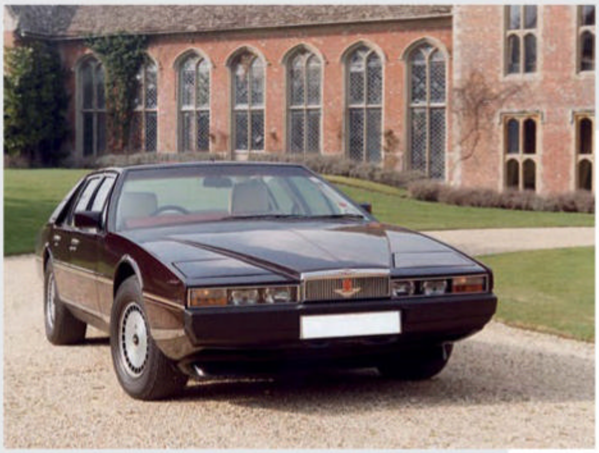
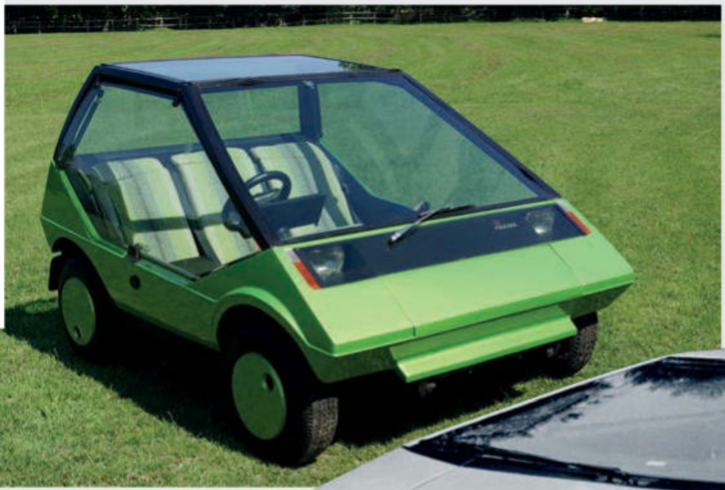


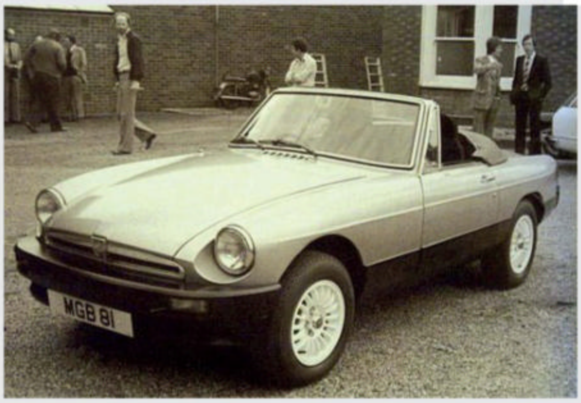
A rare Lagonda Series 1 from 1974 with the wedge-shaped Series 2 that arrived two years later



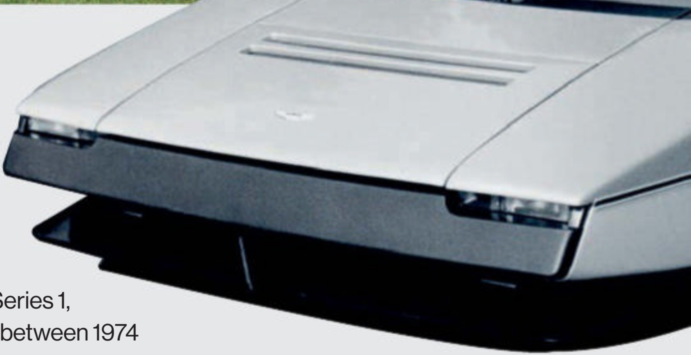
◀ **The second generation of Lagonda saloon from 1976 remains William Towns' most famous model**



▼**The diminutive yet revolutionary Microdot from 1976**



◀ **In 1979, Towns redesigned the MGB for a potential Aston Martin takeover of the famed sportscar manufacturer**



bonnet line and a recessed boot. Equally fascinating, was the deal done with Lotus over the supply of 2.0-litre DOHC engines, which gave the sleek new Jensen-Healey good performance.

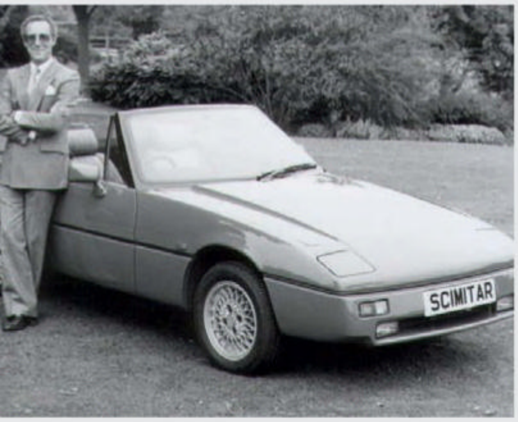
Impressed with William's work, Jensen then commissioned him to style a replacement for their ageing Interceptor supercar. A two-door coupe code-named the F-Type, one of its criteria was that passengers could access the rear without tipping the front seat forwards. A natural follow-on was the G-Type, whose model size sat between the J-H and the F-Type.

Finally, William applied his skills to the outrageous FFF100, a special concept vehicle commission from GKN. Fitted with a GRP body on a Jensen perimeter frame FF chassis, it was powered by a 7.2-litre hemi-head Chrysler engine which produced 640bhp. With its all-wheel-drive transmission, the car could sprint to 100mph and stop in an impressive 12.5 seconds.

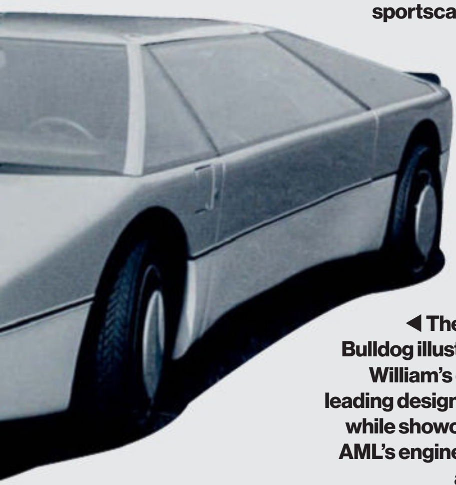
Next, it was back to another contract from Aston Martin, based on the Lagonda saloon, the four-door DBS prototype he'd shaped for David Brown in the late Sixties. Retrospectively called the Series 1, some seven cars were built between 1974 and 1975. However, by then AM's financial position was giving cause for concern as the world's economic crisis began to bite and that year new management took over the company entitled Aston Martin (1975). William's task was to introduce a new four-door car in quick time that would attract orders. Unashamedly wedge-shaped in profile, the car spoke to a glamorous customer while inside were futuristic instruments which included an LED dashboard information and touch-sensitive buttons. It was an electronics tour de force. In all this, Lagonda would continue until 1990, including a facelift Series 4 model with an impressive 636 Lagondas being built in all. It is rumoured that William was offered a Lagonda in lieu of payment.

William then turned his creative skills to styling an even more outrageous-looking supercar called the Bulldog. This model illustrated William's class-leading design skills while showcasing AML's engineering ability with a whirlwind 190mph top speed and powered by a twin turbocharged 5.3-litre engine sandwiched in the rear of a sleek two-seater body and was launched at Woburn Abbey in 1979. It featured a wheel at each corner folded paper shape, five recessed headlamps and horizontal slats at the rear, while inside were twin bulbous roll-top seats and a pronounced transmission tunnel. "I started with the dimensions to pinpoint the location of the driver and the engine behind," William once recalled. It was marketed as the world's ultimate supercar. Although Aston planned to put the Bulldog into limited production, the project was shelved in 1981 when Victor Gauntlett became chairman and only the prototype was built.

In 1976, William revealed the Microdot from his Interstyle studios. With its futuristic styling, everything about this tiny vehicle was revolutionary. Again, it was a concept vehicle with gull-wing glass doors, a novel three abreast seating arrangement and a facility for a shopping trolley that could be slid under



▲ Towns with his Scimitar SS1 sportscar from 1984



◀ The 1979 Bulldog illustrated William's class-leading design skills while showcasing AML's engineering ability

the rear. For such a minimalistic car it was incredibly novel and spacious. With a running costs target of 100mpg, a tiny petrol engine was located under the rear, driving a battery/charging system to power an electric motor positioned beneath the bonnet with chain drive to the front wheels. Today, Microdot is a valuable example of William's consistent evolutionary ideals and making them work successfully. Building prototype cars such as these attracted more commissions, which in turn enabled the funds for the next projects.

The Eighties saw a huge hike in kit car interest and under his Interstyle branding, William developed his own kit car range, called Hustler. Using largely plywood, these angular, modular vehicles were based on Mini components and were available in an almost bewildering variety of options, including a fascinating six-wheel estate version.

When BL announced that it would close its world-renowned Abingdon plant in October 1980, the Aston Martin Lagonda board and a consortium of investors set about to buy the plant for £30m, commissioning William to produce a facelift styling proposal based on the MGB. Inevitably, his client's criteria were to bring the Syd Enever styled 'B of the Sixties up to date, but without altering the main body tub. After AML bought a new MGB roadster, William set to work, the modifications carried out by Aston's Special Projects department at Newport Pagnell. The result was a unique specification which included an MGB GT windscreen and side windows, special black body mouldings for the sides and front plus 14in Wolfrace alloy wheels. However, talks between AML and BL soon broke down, the project was abandoned and the sole car sold off.

Another futuristic design, though, with greater showroom appeal was the TXC Tracer from 1985, which took elements of the Bulldog (such as the row headlights hidden behind a panel that dropped down) and powered by a rear-mounted MG Metro Turbo engine. Using conventional subframes bolted to a steel chassis, the Tracer comprised just seven body panels in typically innovative William fashion with a fully adjustable column/dash/pedal assembly to complement the fixed seats. Once again the concept never went anywhere.

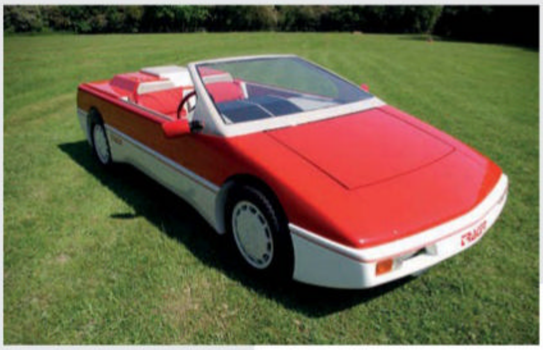
In the late Eighties William took a pair of Jaguar XJ-S V12 convertibles, using them to form the foundation for designing a relaunch for the pre-war Railton marque. In stark contrast to his unashamedly angular Guyson and Lagonda styling, this proposal encompassed a more curvaceous shape, reflecting the mood in motor car designs of the moment. But like the Guyson, the original steel was clothed in new panels, this time made from aluminium by famed coachbuilder, Park Sheet Metal. Only two were built, named Fairmile and Claremont.

Sadly, in 1991, William was diagnosed with cancer. He was treated to cure the condition, but it was to return 18 months later and he died at his beloved Moreton-in Marsh home in 1993.

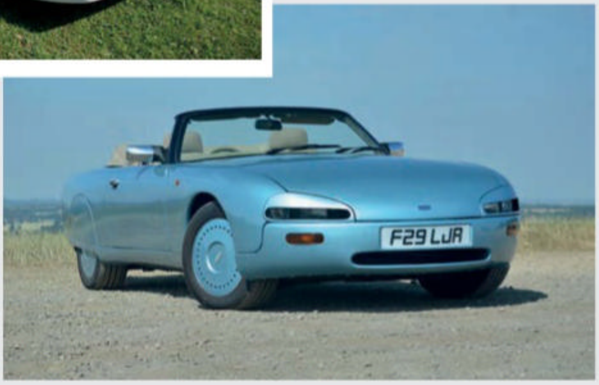
His name will be forever associated with the most exotic and innovative designs to come from a British designer plus one of Aston Martin Lagonda's most famous models. Concludes Lizzie, "William was always anxious to begin the next project, always thinking of the next idea, solving the problems and making them work. He was so passionate about what he did. Just before he died he was working on a water bike project, something new, something exciting. He was that sort of man." **AMD**

● Thanks to: Lizzie Towns, the Aston Martin Heritage Trust and the AMOC for their considerable help with this article.

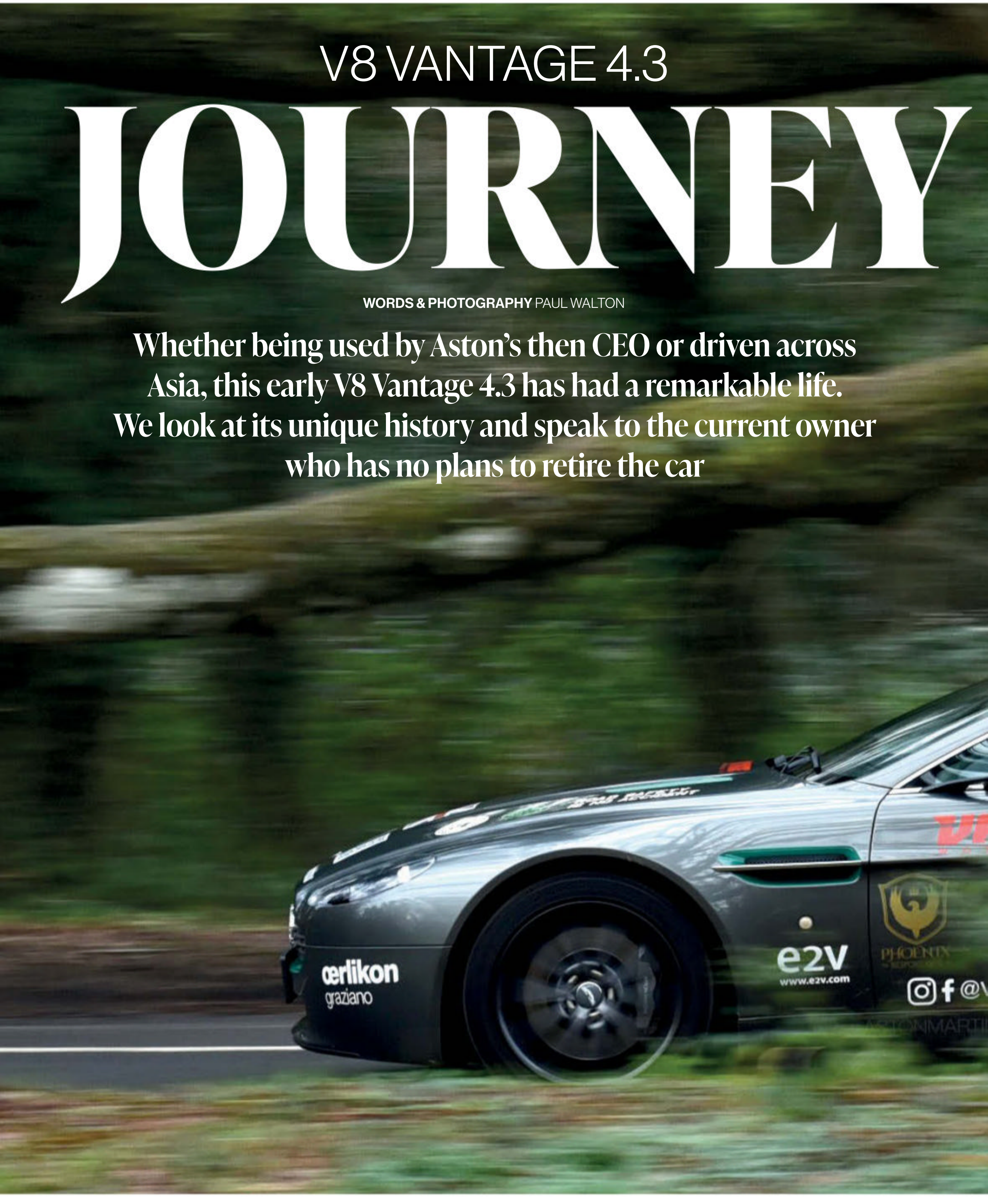
▲ The Lagonda's final facelift in 1987 saw slightly rounder lines



▲ The TXC Tracer concept from 1985



In 1989 Towns brought the ▶ Railton marque back to life with two rebodied Jaguar XJ-S convertibles



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V8 VANTAGE 4.3

JOURNEY

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

Whether being used by Aston's then CEO or driven across Asia, this early V8 Vantage 4.3 has had a remarkable life. We look at its unique history and speak to the current owner who has no plans to retire the car

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OF ALL the ways to travel from Tokyo to London, driving a first generation of V8 Vantage wouldn't be high on anyone's list. With poor ground clearance, lack of interior room and a thirsty engine, it would make an already gruelling journey close to impossible. But that's exactly what this example achieved in 2007 when it became the first car to be driven from one side of the newly completed Asian Highway Network to the other.

Yet incredibly, this mammoth journey is only one of the car's many achievements.

Built in August 2005, the car is the 41st example produced and was originally used by Aston's then CEO, Ulrich Bez, as his company car. Left-hand drive and German registered, he regularly drove the grey Vantage between the company's Gaydon headquarters and his home in Düsseldorf, the service book is still filled with stamps from Moll Sportwagen, the company's official dealership in the city.

To mark production of the 30,000th car to be produced by Aston Martin, which ▶

The Vantage with some of the employees (including CEO Ulrich Bez in the dark suit) that took part in the 30k miles in 30 days project in 2006

rolled off the line during the summer of 2006, Bez's Vantage was chosen for a unique project. It would be driven day and night for 30k miles across Germany's autobahn network by 30 employees in 30 days. The CEO himself drove the first stint that started from the Nürburgring circuit immediately after he and three others finished 24th overall and fourth in class at the annual 24-hour race for GT and saloon cars in June 2006 driving a Vantage N24.

"When we launched our plans to reinvigorate the brand in 2001, Aston Martin had produced just under 20,000 cars in 87 years and now, barely five years later, we are approaching our 30,000th car," said Bez at the time. "This exercise – in conjunction with our success at the Nürburgring – proves what we have always believed; the Vantage is a true 24-hour sports car, tough and usable, and as durable on the track as it is on the road."

To make the dark grey car more visible, it was given some green highlights around the air vents, radiator grille and wing mirrors.

The project finished with the car taking pride of place on Aston Martin's stand at the 2006 British Motor Show. By now it had covered 100,000km (60k miles). Yet this was only a warm-up for what was to come.

While attending a conference in the United Nation's Bangkok building in July 2005 about the opening of a new network of roads, the Asian Highway, British

The Make Roads Safe stickers from the 2007 Asian Highway trip are still on the car

MAKE ROADS SAFE
www.makeroadssafe.org
@vantageworldtour
KR05 YWU

The car still has the green accents added for the 30k miles in 30 days project

journalist turned adventurer, Richard Meredith, had the idea of driving from one side to the other, from Tokyo to Istanbul, before finishing in London. Although this had never been achieved before, Meredith was no stranger to adventurous journeys having driven a Daewoo Kalos hatchback from Luton to Seoul in 2003.

This included an unscheduled drive through the Khyber Pass in Afghanistan only weeks after America's invasion of the country. Since he needed help from the United Nations to get through the war-torn country safely, it put Richard into contact with the organisation that would later be instrumental with his Asian Highway trip.

Richard would be joined by fellow Brit, Phil Colley, a travel specialist and tour operator who had previous experience of travelling in central and eastern Asia.

First, they needed a car, securing perhaps the most inappropriate model imaginable, but one that would bring them plenty of publicity. After contacting several manufacturers, it was Aston Martin that agreed to lend them an example of the V8 Vantage; Bez's former car that had been driven for 30k miles in 30 days.

In his 2008 book about the journey, *Driven Together*, Richard admits the car wouldn't have been the first choice for many, but it did have advantages. "Its high performance engine and low ground clearance would present obvious difficulties on unprepared roads and in remote locations" he wrote, "but, on the other hand, Aston Martin's fame as providing the vehicles of choice in James Bond films and with customers including the British Royal Family, we thought it would give the car an edge for attracting attention everywhere which ▶

would ultimately be to the benefit of our other causes." As for Aston, the journey was an opportunity to provide further evidence of the durability of the car and increase global awareness of the brand. "Richard, Phil and the V8 Vantage face a tough journey," admitted Bez before the trip, "but I have every confidence all three will succeed."

Yet the modifications Aston Martin made to the Vantage prior to the trip were minimal and included raising the suspension a little, adding underbody protection, fitting a full-size spare and two jerrycans in the boot plus a hidden safe behind the passenger seat for valuables.

With Richard wanting to use the trip to raise awareness about road safety, through his contacts in the UN he found support from the FIA Foundation, the charity arm of the motorsport association which had recently embarked on its Make Roads Safe campaign. The trip would also raise money in aid of UNICEF to provide road safety education for children in China.

After two years of preparation and planning, the now UK-registered Vantage was transported to Tokyo with Richard and Phil following, ready for their journey to start on 25 June 2007. The first leg took them through the relative safety of Japan before catching a ferry to South Korea and then another to China. After waiting six days for the car to clear customs, the duo finally set off across this massive country, passing over the desolate high plains.

"Other than widely in Australia and partly in Arizona," wrote Richard, "I cannot remember experiencing distance-driving conditions like this before. The stretch is turning into another great test for the car."

Yet apart from requiring an occasional 'throat clearance' – which Richard reckoned was caused by poor fuel quality – the Vantage behaved impeccably as it would throughout the journey.

On July 17 and after covering 6,705km (4,166 miles), the pair entered Kazakhstan where the poor condition of the roads took them by surprise. "Unlit, unmarked and apparently unmaintained for years, whole sections were rutted and pitted and the passage of large trucks had deformed long stretches into mounds and hollows. Driving it in the road-hugging Aston Martin was like riding a switchback or surfing a wave and the danger of 'grounding' the car was quickly evident."

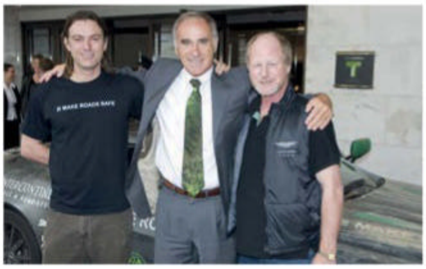
Yet the car survived, and Richard and Phil soon passed into Uzbekistan where they struggled to find fuel of a suitable grade for the Vantage, finally filling up with 98 Octane on the advice of the factory. Not wanting to use anything else, they reached the border with Turkmenistan (and better fuel) 977km (607 miles) later with barely anything left in the tank.

But poor petrol wasn't the worst thing they had to cope with during this section of the trip as Richard explained in *Driven Together*. "The journey was punctured only by the antics of wandering camels in the habit of sitting on the warm asphalt towards the end of each day, causing a driving hazard in the failing light that Aston Martin drivers would not usually be conditioned to encounter on the roads of England (or most other places for that matter)."

A long queue at the port of Turkmenbashi for a ferry across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan meant the pair had to sleep in the car, soon discovering their Vantage did not make a comfortable hotel. "Despite all the electronic leverage of angles and adjustments," wrote Richard, "my conclusion was that it was after all, a seat designed for driving and not for sleeping."

They finally crossed the Caspian Sea and after docking at Baku they drove another 608km (378 miles) to Tbilisi in Georgia where the journey nearly came to an end. After arriving at their hotel, the handbrake failed, causing the car to roll down a hill, only stopping when it sideswiped a sturdy Toyota Land Cruiser that had been parked partially across the car park entrance. Although the damage was superficial, there was still a gaping wound in the driver's door and damage to the rear wing. Thankfully, with help from the understanding Land Cruiser owner, the car was patched up locally, well enough for the journey to continue on to Turkey.

At 4.32pm on 5 August, 12,089km (7,512 miles) after leaving Tokyo, they finally reached Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge, the point where Asia meets Europe. "After 42 days of one of the more significant journeys of modern day motoring," wrote Richard, "we were able to say that we had completed the first official crossing of the new Asian Highway road system with all



Phil Colley (left) and Richard Meredith (right) with Ulrich Bez outside the Intercontinental Hotel, London, at the end of their mammoth journey

its important implications for the future of global travel and trade."

With the surfaces now much improved, the pair could finally relax. "Some smooth roads and motorway driving allowed our so-versatile Aston Martin V8 Vantage to purr along, in such contrast to so much of what had gone before."

The run through Europe passed without incident, and the pair easily travelled 800km (500 miles) in a day. After crossing through 18 countries, Richard and Phil finally reached London on August 14, finishing at the Intercontinental Hotel in Park Lane. They were met by amongst others Ulrich Bez, who had flown into the capital especially to meet them. According to Richard, when Aston's CEO climbed into the cockpit of his former car, he checked the odometer and joked, "Yes, I think we can say that the engine is run-in now." It was a remarkable, once-in-a-lifetime trip that faced many hazards and dangers yet other than the incident with the Land Cruiser in Tbilisi, the Vantage never missed a beat. "We have followed Richard and Phil's ups and downs all the way, and admired their determination," said Bez. "The car, too, has been more than up to the demanding task they asked of it, and we are very proud of its unfailing reliability. This journey has been the V8 Vantage's toughest test to date and reiterates that the Vantage is a truly usable and durable sports car."

Following some publicity events, the Vantage – still wearing its Asian Highway livery and now with 185,000km (115k miles) on the clock – was sold by Aston Martin at auction on Monday 3 December 2007 for £34k with all proceeds going to UNICEF China.

The new owner initially used it for the occasional European amateur rally – the odometer reaching 200,000km (124,274 miles) in 2013 – but by 2021 and after being largely unused for several years, the car was for sale through Duke of London, a dealer of prestigious cars based in Brentford, where it caught the attention of Phil Churchill.

After reading several motoring adventure books during the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020, he'd been considering doing something similar with his now 17-year-old son, William, for some time, initially with a Porsche since he'd owned several examples of the German marque. But since it had already been prepared by Aston for the Asian Highway journey and had left-hand-drive, the Vantage seemed perfect for whatever they planned. "I also loved the car's history," Phil tells me when I visit him at his Surrey home.

Although he bought the Aston for a mere £20k, it needed an immediate seven grand recommissioning because it had not been used for some time. With the car as ready as it will ever be, Phil started looking at his own adventure.

Instead of one long journey circumnavigating the globe, Phil plans to explore the world one continent at a time over several years. He initially wanted to start by going east but the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 put a stop to this.

And so, he decided to go in the opposite direction instead and in late 2022 booked the car on to a container ship sailing between Liverpool and New York in early March 2023. Phil and William will then fly to America during the Easter holidays and after collecting the Vantage, drive across the States, visiting Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis and Houston before ▶

passing into Mexico. Phil then plans to leave the car in storage in Cancún on the north-east coast. Since it's within the 22-mile-deep Mexico Free Border Zone, the car doesn't need an import permit and can be kept there indefinitely.

The father and son team will then go back to Mexico at the end of 2023 to head further into central America including Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica before finishing at the Panama Canal, leaving the Vantage at a so-far unorganised safe location. The following year will see them drive through South America to Tierra del Fuego on the southern tip of the continent.

Beyond that, Phil has no exact plans, but is considering transporting the car to New Zealand and then Australia before potentially heading to Malaysia, Thailand and maybe China, picking up some of the Asian Highway to bring the car home. "It could be four or five years before it's back."

When Phil shows me around the Vantage, I'm surprised at its condition. Still wearing the same stickers as on its 2007 Asian Highway adventure (plus a few new ones added by Phil for his) as well as the green accents from the 30k miles in 30 days project, it looks to have barely changed since that time. Admittedly, the filler used to hastily repair the damage the rear panel picked up in Tbilisi is starting to crack, but otherwise the paint looks remarkably sharp for an 18-year-old coupe with 215,000km (133,600 miles) under its tyres. And although Phil tells me the suspension remains slightly raised, it must be by millimetres since the car's stance looks little different from a standard model.

The interior is equally clean, but Phil reckons the seats are from a DB9. Offering more comfort, it's not known whether they were fitted for the 30k miles in 30 days attempt or the Asian Highway journey, but they do have a minor glitch, something Phil only discovered after he'd bought the Vantage.

"The first time I sat in the car, I couldn't fit and despite fiddling with the seat, I kept going forwards. Meanwhile, William – who's more level-headed – found a cheat sheet for the car that says if you want to move the seats backwards, you have to move them all the way forward and then down, almost like a reset."

When I open the boot, I'm faced by a full-size spare wheel and two red jerrycans fixed into place, leaving little room for luggage. Admittedly, there's a narrow shelf behind the seats (which hides the small, lockable safe fitted by Aston's engineers), but Richard and Phil must have packed extremely lightly for their 42-day journey across Asia as Phil and William will have to for their trip.

It might be a standard (if early) 2005 V8 Vantage 4.3 but due to its unique history, I'm still excited when Phil graciously offers me a drive. It doesn't take many miles for me to realise that despite the high figure in the odometer, the Vantage still has the tightness of a car that's covered half of that.

The 380bhp 4.3-litre V8 delivers its power the moment I squeeze the throttle, resulting in a strong and instant surge of acceleration. The steering remains accurate and perfectly weighted allowing me to take corners quickly despite the wet and greasy conditions of the roads. As we swoop around the quiet Surrey country roads that surround Phil's home, I can't imagine it would have felt any different from when Richard Meredith was navigating the slightly more desolate high plains of China.

A V8 Vantage might still be an unusual choice for crossing Asia yet not only did this car survive but it handled the many hazards it faced along the way with ease. And thanks to its adventurous current owner recognising these abilities, it's clear the car's travelling days aren't over yet. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Phil and William Churchill (www.vantageworldtour.com)**

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DB6 MK1

GOLD RUSH

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

We take a recently restored DB6, in the relatively rare colour of Autumn Gold, for an autumnal drive across the beautiful North York Moors

WITH THE throttle as perfectly balanced as the steering, I exit the corner quickly and cleanly, ready for the long straight that follows. The road ahead of me is as empty as the view and, as I floor the throttle, the 3.9-litre engine delivers its power in one raspy, snarling lump, turning the car into a golden blur against the similarly coloured countryside.

It's the long straights and fast, swooping corners such as these, together with its isolation, that makes the A169 one of the UK's best driving roads.

The 21-mile section that snakes over the top of the North York Moors between Pickering and Whitby is especially exciting. And how better to explore this fantastic stretch of tarmac than in one of Aston's best but underrated sports cars; a DB6?

"Nice car, mate," says a random passer-by as I park the car in the centre of Pickering, the pretty market town 25 miles north of York. I sheepishly admit to it not being mine, quickly adding (before he calls the police) that I've just borrowed it from specialist Classic & Sportscar Centre down the road in nearby Malton. He's right, though; it is a nice car. Autumn Gold was never a common Aston colour in the Sixties and many – like this one had been –

▶

were subsequently changed for the more popular Silver Birch. Yet the light hue suits the car. Not only does it make the Aston appear more regal than it already is, but when the stark autumnal sunlight hits the panels, it starts to have a golden glow like the kids in the famous Ready Brek advert of the Seventies and Eighties.

Being produced on 8 July 1967 means this particular example – chassis 3112/R – comes from the first two years of DB6 production. After being supplied new by Lazenby Garages of Leicestershire, it spent less than a decade on the road because by the time the DVLA went on to a computerised system in the late Seventies, PMK 47E was not road taxed. It wasn't until 1988 when the car was re-registered and put back on the road by an Aston Martin enthusiast who kept it for around ten years.

Between 2015 and 2017, the now grey coupe received a £200k restoration courtesy of leading marque specialist, Aston Workshop based in Durham, which included a bare metal respray back to

BOROU
OF
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its original Autumn Gold, a complete overhaul of the original 3.9-litre engine plus all the mechanical components were checked and refinished as required.

Although many of the original parts were retained – such as the hydraulic power-assisted steering and a period Radiomobile sound system – the automatic transmission, that the car was originally fitted with, was upgraded to a modern five-speed manual making it a car that deserves to be driven and enjoyed, not displayed. And that's exactly what I intend to do.

The Autumn Gold DB6 in Pickering, the start of Paul's journey

Trees line the road in places and with this being late 2022, their leaves are turning the same shade of gold as the car

The plan is simple; I'm going to drive between Pickering and Whitby on the A169 that cuts across the North York Moors. Not only does the road offer spectacular views over the harsh countryside, but the many long straights and fast corners will be a proper test for this icon of the Sixties.

When I slip behind the large, wood-rimmed steering wheel, I'm greeted by a similar design of dash that was in the 1958 DB Mk III featured in the previous issue. Together with heavy use of chrome that's splashed across the fascia, it makes the DB6's interior appear more old-fashioned than other sports cars from the era such as the Jaguar E-type Series 2 or Ferrari Dino. But like a handmade Savile Row suit or anything by Frank Sinatra, it still has a timeless style that will never go out of date.

The engine churns into life the moment I twist the key in the ignition, that's located high on the fascia. I leave Pickering's pretty market square – the familiar roar of the straight-six engine ricocheting off the buildings causing even more heads to turn – and join the A169 to start my journey towards the coast.

The 21-mile road goes back to the 18th century when three Acts of Parliament for the building of a turnpike (or toll road) between Whitby and Pickering were granted in 1784, 1785 and 1827. Incredibly, the road wasn't tarred over until the Thirties, being laid with limestone until then. But in those early days, the traffic would have been nothing more than an occasional stagecoach, a farmer's horse and cart, or perhaps a flock of sheep wanting a day out at the seaside. Today, 6,500 vehicles a year use the road, meaning it's tabletop-smooth and perfect for a Sixties sports car. The first section cuts through the usually lush and fertile Yorkshire countryside, which on this cold autumn day looks empty and barren. Trees also line the road in places and with this being late 2022, their leaves are turning the same shade of gold as the car.

A couple of miles further north, where the A169 enters the North York Moors National Park, the road starts to climb, offering tremendous views across the moors. I look out to the Hole of Horcum, a spectacular amphitheatre, which is 120m ▶

deep and 1km wide. Local legend has it that the hole was made by a mythological giant called Wade who picked up a clod of earth and threw it at his wife, making both the hole and nearby Blakey Topping where the clod landed. I wonder what Mrs Wade did in retaliation. Since Wade has a strong association with the sea (his boat is mentioned in Chaucer's The Merchant's Tale), I hope it was to hide his oar.

An even better view than of the moors, though, is the one through the screen and down the Aston's long, golden bonnet. As evocative as the exhaust note, it's easy to understand why Aston's famed DB models of the Sixties continue to fascinate us. As one of the few cars (the E-type and original Mini being two more) that are a part of British society and culture, everyone who saw the car during my trip knew exactly the name of the manufacturer, if not necessarily the model (most thought it was a DB5, "You know, like Bond drives"). Not something that could be said about an obscure Italian or German model.

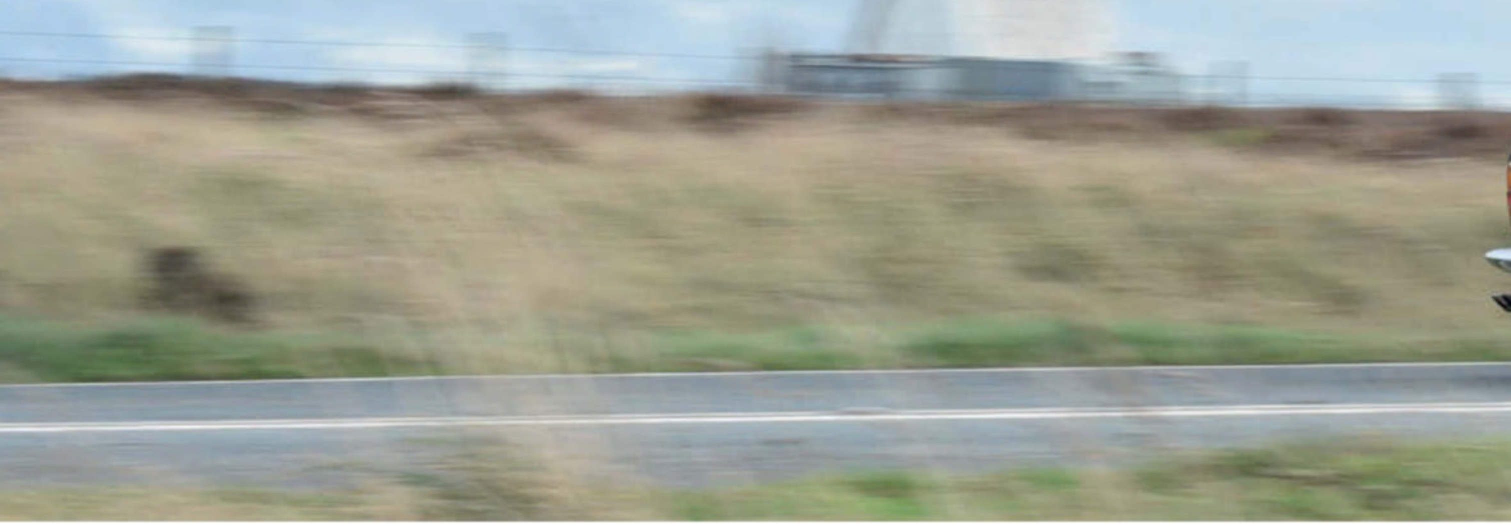
But as I roar across the Yorkshire countryside, I wonder why the DB6 isn't as universally loved or recognised as the DB5. Admittedly the 007 connection is key here. On and off for almost 60 years, the Silver Birch DB5 has been connected with one of the most famous film series in the world, making it as recognisable as George Barris' iconic Batmobile from the TV series or a certain time-travelling DeLorean. Plus, when the DB6 was designed in the mid-Sixties, an extra four inches was added to the existing DB5's chassis and the rear redesigned accordingly, becoming squarer with a small spoiler. Although hardly a monstrosity, the new car's proportions weren't quite as perfect as those of its immediate predecessor.

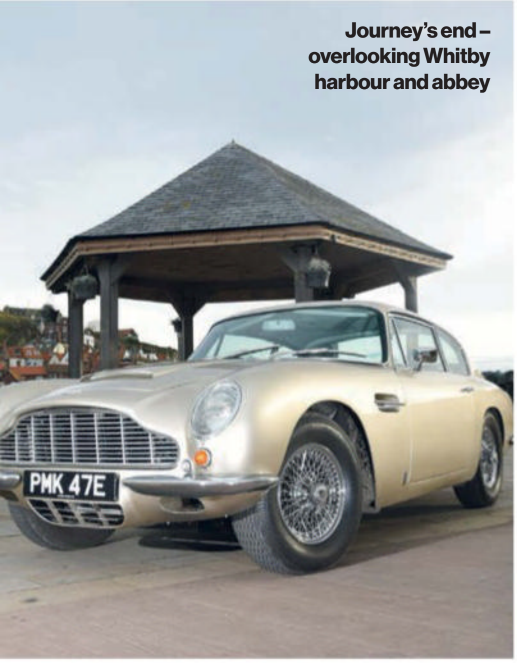
Like all updates should be, the DB6 was a significant improvement over the 5, offering more interior room while power steering had become standard and air-conditioning optional. But more importantly, this car still has the aura and mystique all Aston Martins from the era have; I've driven hundreds of classic cars over the years, but few – if any – feel as special as this. Yet at £350,000, this immaculate Autumnal Gold DB6 is half the price of a DB5.

My reverie is broken by a series of corners, a long right-hander followed by a left. With the road also dipping quickly, they're the Yorkshire equivalent of two of the most famous corners in the Monaco Grand Prix circuit, Grand Hotel Hairpin and Mirabeau Bas. There might be more trucks and a lot less glamour here, but this car still makes the bends just as exciting as if I was on the Côte d'Azur. With the car weighing a surprisingly light 1,474kg, the Aston slices through the corners with ease, the power steering offering the perfect amount of resistance to remain quick, precise and perfect for roads like this. The moors now dominate the view out of the screen – much like the horizon from a plane – and I accelerate hard for a following

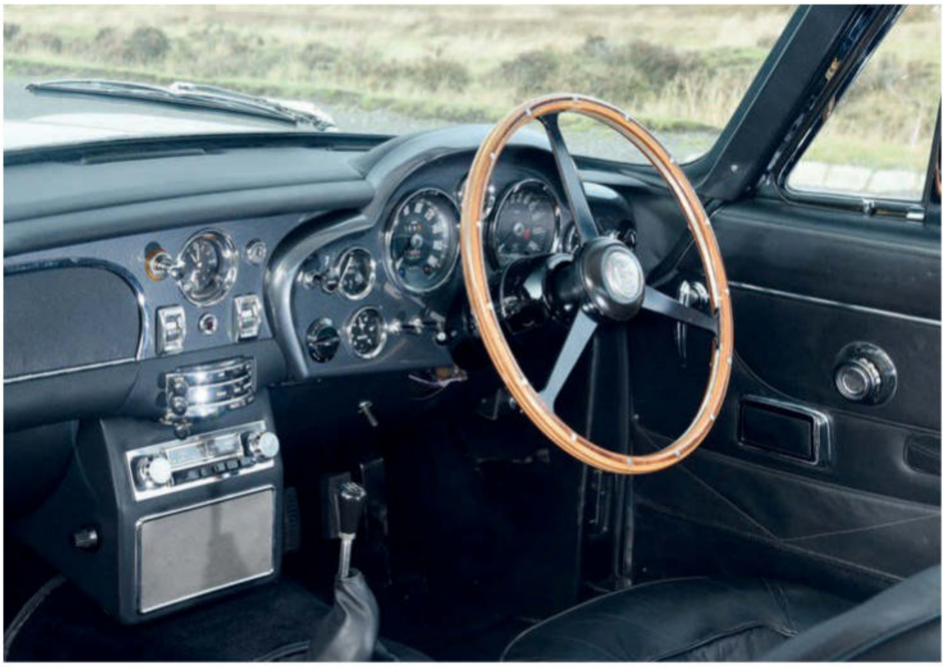
straight, filling all of North Yorkshire with that raspy exhaust note. It might not be a Vantage, but the 3.9-litre straight-six still produces a healthy 282bhp, meaning its performance is strong and punchy, the Tadek Marek-designed unit always eager to deliver its power.

The road starts to ascend once again, meandering back and forth up to the top of Snod Hill, where, in the distance, is an enormous flat-headed pyramid, its eeriness heightened by a whisper of early





Journey's end – overlooking Whitby harbour and abbey



morning mist. It might look like an alien spacecraft (although I'm not sure why they would land here, miles from civilisation, the British government or even a decent coffee), but this is RAF Fylingdales, a radar base.

The station originally consisted of three 130ft spheres built in 1962/3 (universally nicknamed the 'Golfballs'), they were replaced in the early Nineties by the current 120ft structure. RAF Fylingdales' objective is to alert UK and US governments of an impending ballistic missile attack (the so-called four-minute warning during the Cold War), plus detect and track orbiting objects. I cross my fingers that it doesn't track the speed of golden classic cars. Not that I need a radar to be seen; despite what MI6 might think, Aston Martins aren't very discreet and amongst the ordinary modern cars, this golden DB6 stands out like a thoroughbred horse would in a field of donkeys.

After I negotiate another tight corner with ease, passing into the borough of Scarborough that's named after the larger seaside town 20 miles further south, the road starts to climb again. Following a delightfully fast, long sweeping curve there's another long straight that gives tremendous views over Goathland. Between 1992 and 2010, this pretty little village was home to the popular British TV series *Heartbeat* that was set in the Sixties and was about a Yorkshire bobby. Fantasising that I'm in an episode about a bank robber being chased by a Ford Anglia 105E police car, I drop down a gear and gun the engine. The car picks ▶

Passing Flyingdales, the RAF radar base

up speed as cleanly and easily and if I really was being chased by the rozzers in a diminutive 1.0-litre saloon, I'd have left them behind long ago.

Just as the surprisingly blue North Sea becomes visible over the edge of the moors, the road starts to descend more quickly than it climbed. Blue Bank is a steep, one-in-five (20 per cent) gradient that's famed for its accidents, the most famous being on 21 July 1929, when the brakes of a bus failed, and it careered off the road at the bottom of the bank. At the point of the crash, the bus wrecked several beehives, and the rescue effort was hampered by hundreds of angry insects.

Where the road starts to flatten is the village of Sleights, the name coming from the Old Norse for *sletta*, meaning flat land. The Norsemen might have conquered huge swathes of Europe, but they clearly weren't very imaginative.

The junction with the A171, after I cross the River Esk, marks the end of the A169. It's also where the first German bomber, a Heinkel He 111, was shot down on British soil during the second world war, on 3 February 1940. To mark the location, a decade later two stone columns from a nearby bridge that were washed away during the flooding of July 1930 were positioned either side of the A171/A169 roundabout.

I manage to join the A171 in one piece and begin the final drive into Whitby, the beautiful harbour town famous for being the place where British explorer James Cook started his career as an apprentice in 1747. The town's other claim to fame is more macabre, being the location of Dracula's arrival into England in Bram Stoker's 1897 novel of the same name. Disguised as a large dog, he bounded up the 199 steps to the 11th century abbey that sits on a cliff overlooking Whitby. Still, I doubt he received as much attention as I do in the DB6.

After successfully navigating the busy roads – aided by the car's light steering and notably sharp, but progressive, brakes – my journey ends overlooking Whitby's pretty harbour and the ruins of the abbey. Despite being a chilly November day, the always popular seaside town is still busy with tourists and the gold car gets even more admiring glances than it did in Pickering.

"Nice car."

"Apparently so."

The drive from Pickering has been a little over 20 miles, a blink of an eye in a modern DB11, but the DB6 has transformed it into a much bigger and more memorable adventure than its modern descendent, thanks to the aural and visceral excitement it offers.

The DB6 might always be overshadowed by the DB5, but, thanks to its speed, handling and still good looks, I couldn't think of a better car for this autumnal gold rush through the majestic North York Moors. **AMD**

● **Thanks to: Classic & Sportscar Centre in Malton, North Yorkshire, for the use of the beautiful DB6 featured here. See this car and many others at www.classicandsportscar.ltd.uk or call 01944 758000**

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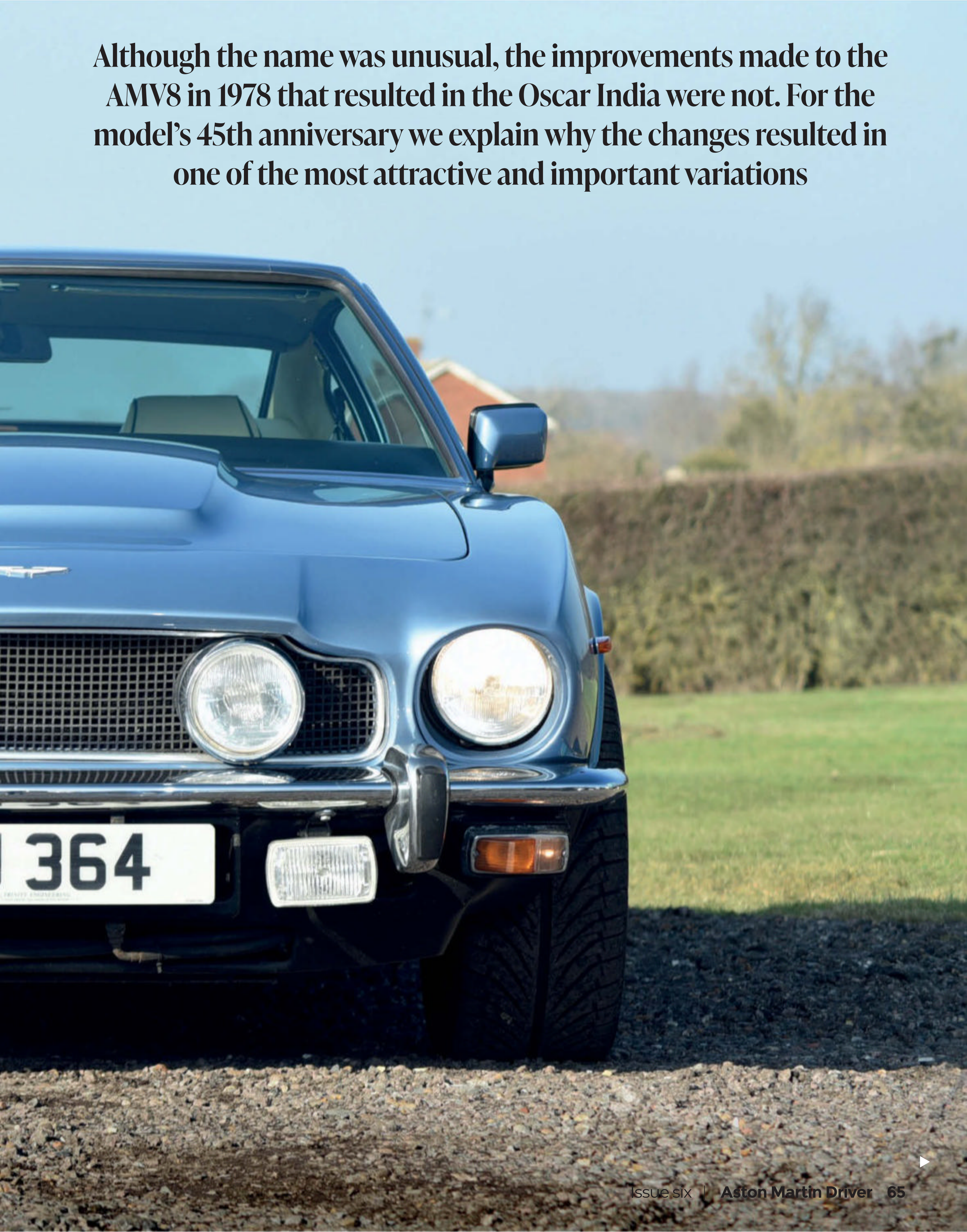
MODEL PROFILE

CODE BLUE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

Although the name was unusual, the improvements made to the AMV8 in 1978 that resulted in the Oscar India were not. For the model's 45th anniversary we explain why the changes resulted in one of the most attractive and important variations



THE TERM 'Oscar India' might sound like a codename Richard Burton would have used during a Seventies war film, but for those in the know, it relates to a specific model in the long history of the Aston Martin AMV8. Although an unofficial designation, the updates behind it resulted in arguably the best version of the model so far and certainly the most luxurious.

As *Motor* magazine said in its 3 March 1979 issue, "Few can match the finish of this fine example of British craftsmanship." And 45 years since the unusually named V8 Oscar India made its debut, that's still the case.

Following Aston Martin's bankruptcy in 1974 and subsequent rescue two years later, by the late Seventies its sole product, the AMV8 was suffering from a lack of investment. As a development of the DBS that had originally debuted in 1967, the car was clearly old-fashioned, especially compared to newer four-seat GT rivals such as the BMW 6-Series, Ferrari 400i and Jaguar XJ-S.

Coming a year after the introduction of the higher-powered Vantage model, in 1978 the car received its most significant and important facelift to date. In conjunction with the DBS's original designer, William Towns, the exterior was given a slight makeover which consisted of a rear boot spoiler similar to that of the Vantage, while the bonnet intake was closed resulting in a discreet power bulge.

The new V8 Volante from June 1978 had been the first Aston Martin since the DB2/4 of the Fifties to feature an interior of burr walnut and as part of its facelift, the coupe followed suit. Other changes included a hide rather than a cloth headlining, restyled headrests, a new centre console with a cigarette lighter for rear passengers plus improved air-conditioning. Compared to the monotone black vinyl of the DBS and early V8 models, this was the interior the critics had been waiting for.

"Although traditional almost to the point of being old-fashioned," continued *Motor* in its March 1979 issue, "we found the interior's combination of polished walnut, beige Connolly hide and deep pile carpet to be quite exquisite and assembled to a standard fully in keeping with the quality of the materials used."

The modifications might have been minor and didn't include any changes to the current generation of Aston's 5.3-litre V8 engine (the V540), but together they helped keep the clearly ageing model credible for the approaching new decade.

Yet when this update made its debut at the 1978 British Motor Show, it didn't have an official name. The factory, though, did have one for the car and the most common theory is that it came from Aston Martin's then chairman, Alan Curtis's love of all things aviation, plus the date for its introduction. When using the NATO phonetic alphabet, 'October introduction' becomes 'Oscar India.'

But Aston Martin's then director of engineering, Mike Loasby, says the name had another source. "Oscar India was so called so that we could refer to it amongst ourselves at Aston Martin without anybody knowing what it was called," he said in David Dowsey's 2007 book, *Aston Martin: Power, Beauty and Soul*. "The registration letters of the Cessna 152 aeroplane that Alan Curtis used to fly up from Blackbush to Cranfield were Golf, Bravo, Foxtrot, Oscar India (G-BFOI). We called the car 'Oscar India' because people would think that we were referring to the aircraft. It didn't stand for October introduction, not in my book it didn't."

Whether it was either of these or a mixture of the two, the term has come to define this era of Aston Martin AMV8 although it's also now known by the less exotic-sounding Series 4.

In June 1980 the V540-generation of V8 was replaced by the V580 that featured the same cylinder head as the

ASTON MARTIN V8

Lagonda Series 2. There was also larger and Tuftrided (hardened) dished valves, polynomial camshaft profiles, the same smaller cylinder porting as the Vantage and barrel-shaped pistons while the compression ratio was increased to 9.3:1. Although power remained roughly the same, mid-range torque was improved.

"The Aston Martin engine doesn't feel tame, nor sound quiet," said *Performance Car* magazine in its March 1985 test of the company's 10,000 car, a standard AMV8 in Oscar India spec. "In full throttle there is a surge of induction noise, quiet enough to drown a normally-set radio, even though it settles down to a dull mumble in high-speed cruising."

Around the same time as the V580, gas struts for the bonnet, interior switches for the petrol filler cap, electrically adjusted wing mirrors and central locking for both doors were also introduced.

The only other update of significance came in 1983 when the GKN wheels Aston had been using since the early Seventies were swapped for 15in BBS alloys with a lattice design that was popular at the time.

This Winchester Blue saloon from 1984 is a perfect example of a late V8 Oscar India. Fitted (as most were) with the optional Cibie driving lights in the radiator grille, the big, burly design is both muscular yet handsome, its lines ▶

slightly softened over time compared to Towns' original, harder edged DBS while the tail spoiler gives it a more aggressive look especially from the rear. It's worth noting the original BBS alloys have been replaced by similar-looking Ronals that were usually fitted to later Vantages powered by the higher performance X-Pack engine.

There could have been no denying even when the Oscar India revision was first revealed 45 years ago it was an old-fashioned car. The upshot, though, is that it hasn't aged or dated as much as some of its more modern, fashion-lead contemporaries of the time such as the square-edged Ferrari Testarossa or the over-the-top Porsche 959.

The door unlatches with the familiar positive, mechanical click only Aston Martins of this vintage offer and I sink into the soft, sweetly perfumed Connolly leather. Although on first glance the traditional dash of white on black dials, acres of veneer and a slightly chaotic layout is similar in style to that other great British GT of the time, the Jaguar XJ-S, but by being clearly handmade by men in brown coats rather than on a production line, it's like comparing a Savile Row suit with an off-the-peg M&S two-piece. Apparently it took nine hides to complete the interior which doesn't surprise me since there's leather everywhere. I'm a little disappointed when I discover it doesn't continue inside the slim glovebox.

The big V8 churns lazily over a couple of times before firing, the engine sounding surprisingly quiet for such a big brute. Don't be fooled though; this delusion soon comes to an end when I squeeze the throttle hard for the first time and the interior is filled with a deep baritone cacophony of noise.

Aston Martin was always reluctant to reveal power figures but *Performance Car's* 1985 test reckoned 306bhp. A reasonably healthy figure for the time (Jaguar's 5.3 V12 had 15bhp less), even today the big V8 needs effort deliver its seemingly never-ending levels of beefy, raw power.

Yet there's no denying the unit also lacks the smoothness of Jaguar's magnificent V12 and I can always feel the V8 throb and

▶

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1984 AMV8 Oscar India
Engine: 5,340cc V8
Power: 306bhp
Max speed: 146mph
0-60mph: 6.6 secs
Transmission: 3-spd auto
Weight: 1,802kg
Price new: £39,999
Value now: £110,000 - £125,000

vibrate. Although this means the car lacks the refinement of an XJ-S, it also gives the big Aston a unique, unforgettable, and unharnessed character.

This car, like all but 13 non-Vantage V8 Oscar Indias, is fitted with the Chrysler three-speed automatic gearbox. The reason for the difference was money; the American-sourced transmission cost AML £150 while the five-speed manual from German firm ZF was ten times that. Slow, dim-witted and leisurely, the changes don't always happen on time, which can hinder the car's performance.

Grip is good, the steering surprisingly accurate and thanks to the recently fitted Vantage-spec springs and dampers, this example rides beautifully, lacking some of the vagueness these cars can suffer from. But I'm always aware of the its weight – a relatively chunky 1,802kg (3,969lb) – especially through corners or braking meaning it lacks the confidence of more driver-focused GTs of the time including the Porsche 928 and Ferrari 400i.

Yet it's still a relaxed and comfortable drive, aided in no small part by the cosseting nature of the interior. Only the engine's growl and forceful acceleration stops me from believing I'm in the living room of my late grandparents.

Although a mere 291 AMV8 Oscar Indias were produced, it still set the standard for later models. In terms of materials and ambiance, the 1990 Virage I drove in issue 4 of *AMD* featured a very similar interior to this 1984 car, while veneer remains an option on the DB11, albeit in much smaller quantities.

Oscar India might sound like a hard-to-crack codename but there can be little confusion over the positive impact the car would have on Aston Martin's immediate future.**AMD**

● **Thanks to: Keith Riddington from Classicmobilia for the use of the car featured (www.classicmobilia.com)**

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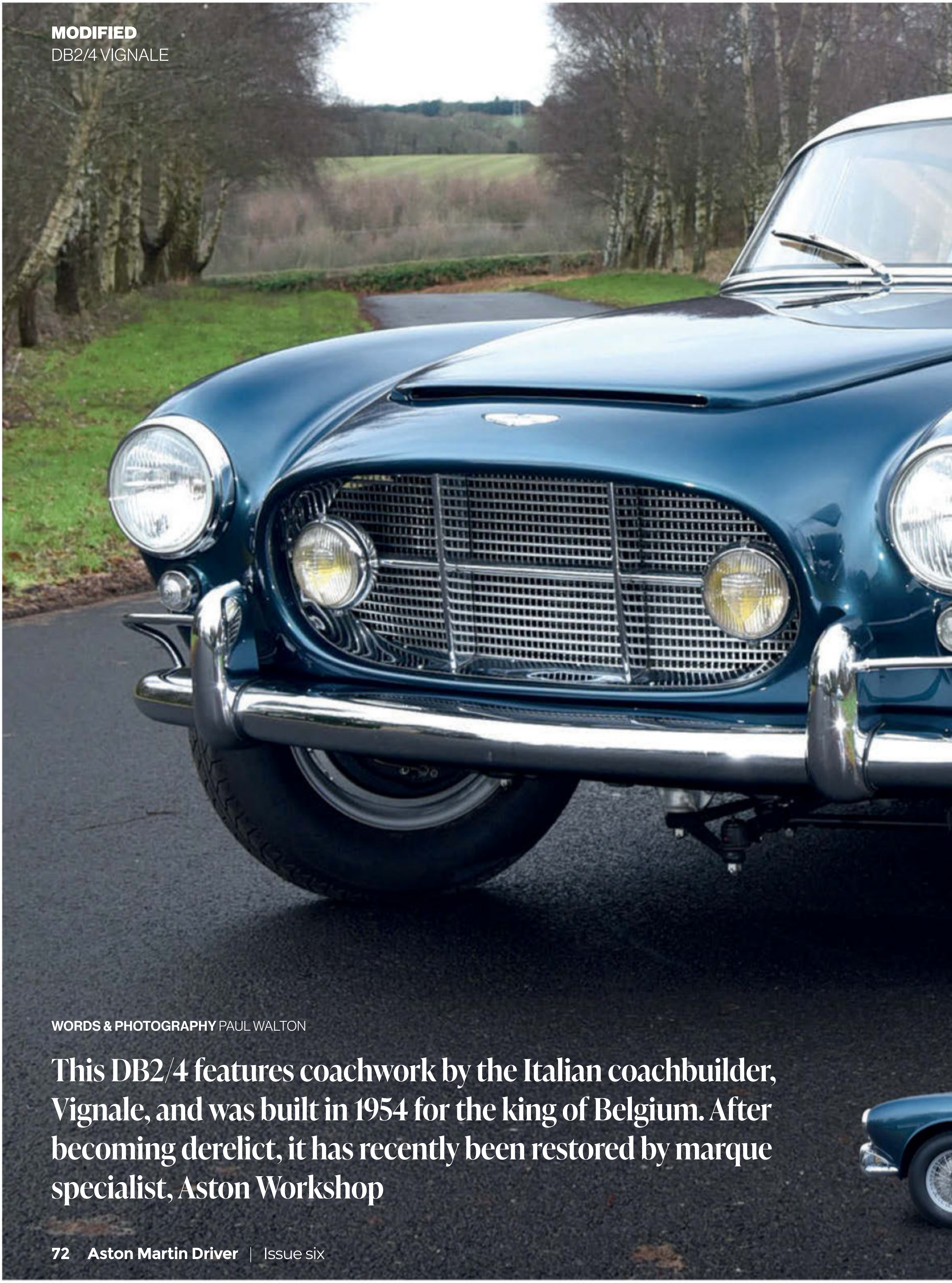


WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

This DB2/4 features coachwork by the Italian coachbuilder, Vignale, and was built in 1954 for the king of Belgium. After becoming derelict, it has recently been restored by marque specialist, Aston Workshop

THE ITALIAN JOB

ALTHOUGH THE trend for unique coach-built cars was in decline by the mid-Fifties, the rich and famous (mainly the rich) still preferred such vehicles over production models. People like the 24-year-old King Baudouin of Belgium, who in 1954, commissioned the Italian coachbuilder, Carrozzeria Alfredo Vignale of Turin, to transform an Aston Martin DB2/4 into something more glamorous.

Baudouin (Boudewijn in Dutch) was no stranger to such cars since his father, King Leopold III, owned several Bugattis and Ferraris plus a Packard convertiblewhich he crashed in 1935 while driving along the banks of Lake Lucerne, Switzerland, killing his wife, Baudouin's mother, Princess Astrid of Sweden.

After surrendering to the Germans in May 1940, Leopold wasn't overly popular with the Belgian population and following growing post-war social unrest, he abdicated in 1951 in favour of his then 20-year-old heir, Baudouin. Free of the shackles of power, the former king indulged in his passion for cars even more and bought several coach-built Ferraris.

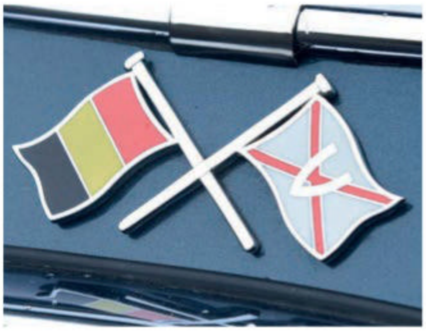
The new king also owned exotic models including plenty of Porsches and Maseratis plus more stately models such as a Mercedes-Benz Pullman. This makes Baudouin's choice of an Aston Martin DB2/4 an unusual but still legitimate one. Although rare on the continent, it was universally acknowledged as a fine sports car while the company was enjoying greater prominence in racing with the DB3.

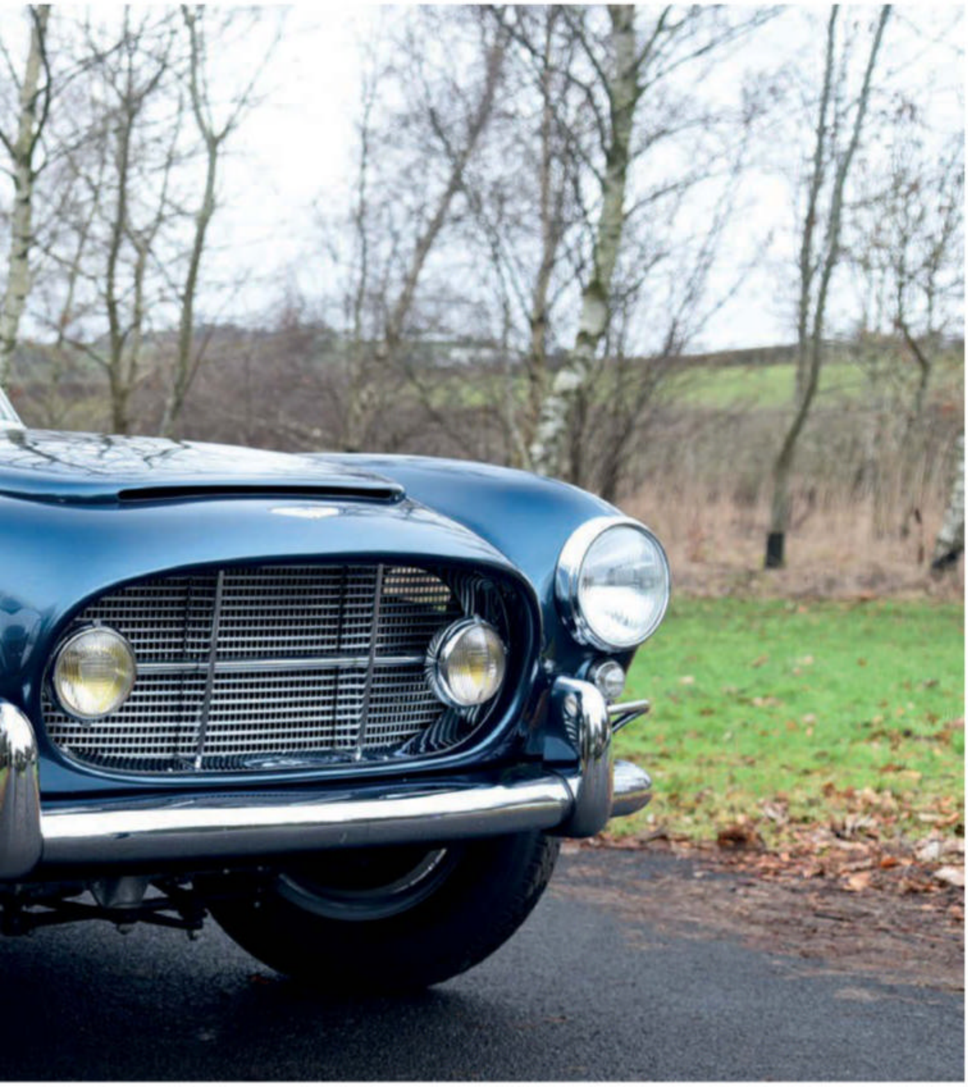
On 28 September 1954, a left-hand-drive rolling chassis – LML/802, one of a dozen Aston Martins produced for continental coachbuilders – fitted with the-then new 2.9-litre straight-six, was delivered to Italy's Carrozzeria Alfredo Vignale for a stylish new body.

The link between the young Belgian king and Vignale was a Ferrari 250MM that the carrozzerie had recently completed for his father's second wife, Lilian, Princess of Réthy. It's rumoured the DB2/4 Vignale was made so the new king wasn't upstaged by his stepmother...

This would be Vignale's second Aston Martin, the first being a DB3 that it had

King Baudouin of Belgium during a visit to Paris in the early Fifties





designed a lightweight coupe body for a year earlier. After spending almost two decades as a panel beater at Stabilimenti Farina, Alfredo Vignale established his own Turin-based carrozzerie in 1948, and together with Bertone, Ghia and Pininfarina, quickly established himself as one of the country's leading independent designers of the era.

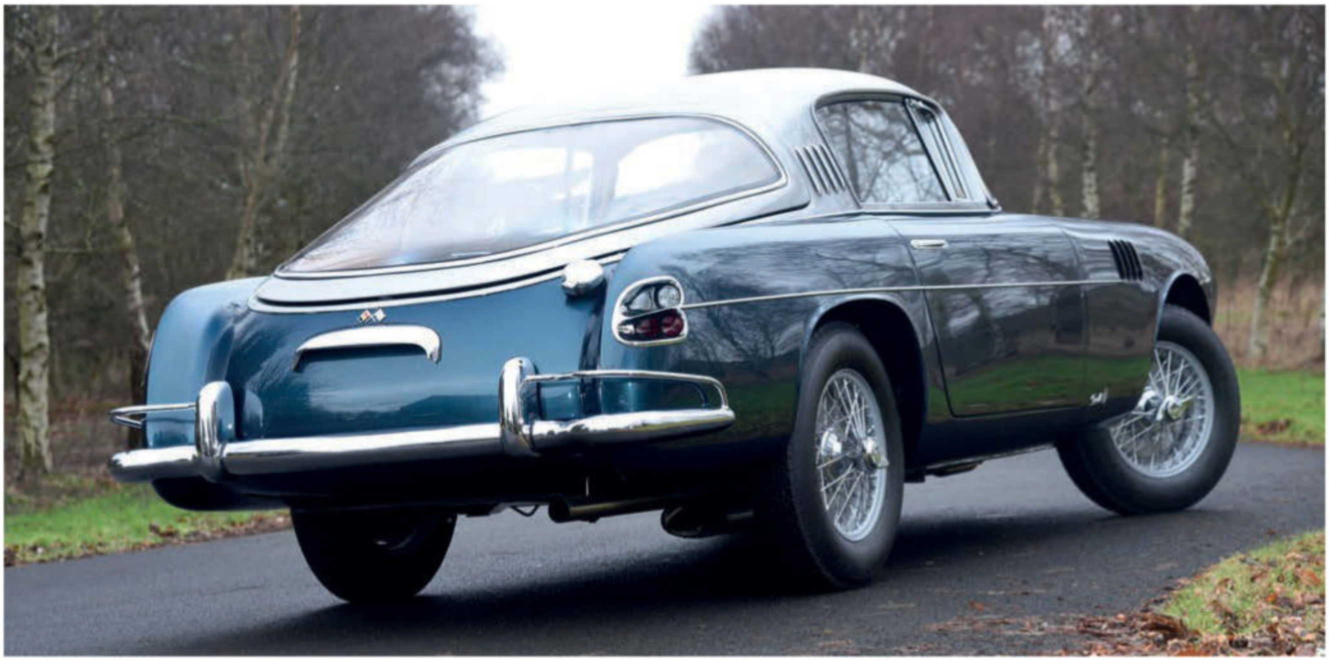
Although Vignale supplied bodies to most Italian companies, it was Ferrari that brought the designer the most international fame especially when its cars with his designs won the Mille Miglia road race three times between 1950 and 1953.

Away from motorsport, the other reason why Vignale's cars became famous was because of their bold, eye-catching designs and despite the chassis' British origins, Baudouin's Aston Martin DB2/4 would be no different. The resultant car, painted in striking Peacock Blue with a silver roof, was a modern fastback that featured a large rear hatch glazed with Perspex, handsome, compact proportions plus a wrap-around windscreen. Italian in character, it turned the traditional, pint-of-stout DB2/4 into a glass of light and fizzy Lambrusco.

When Vignale used the car for its advertising, it was described as, "A two-seater Aston Martin coupe with a European personality." It was perhaps due to this publicity why a second example based on chassis LML/608 was produced for a French customer, but which has long since disappeared.

Baudouin clearly got tired of waiting for his car, because a month before Vignale finally delivered it on 10 March 1955, he acquired a standard DB2/4. Maybe it's because he preferred this unmodified version or perhaps he felt as sovereign he needed something less ostentatious, but Baudouin sold the Vignale only a few years later to a palace aide, R Feldhein.

In January 1962, it was bought by James Toth, an American serviceman who worked at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), then based in Paris, who discovered the Aston for sale in a backstreet garage. Black and white images show he later removed the front bumper and radiator slats to improve its appearance. ▶



Toth used the car regularly until a con rod pushed its way through the engine block. He repaired the engine with a replacement rod, piston and liner before brazing a patch over the hole. Unsurprisingly, this only lasted a short time before the block split end to end.

One of Toth's colleagues had a brother who worked for Aston Martin so, after borrowing some money, he flew to England to collect a new block, liners, piston and con rods and everything else required to get the car running again.

But during the summer of 1963, this rebuilt engine also failed. "While driving with the fiancé past the queues outside the picture house at 15 miles an hour," said Toth years later, "once again the engine blew up; pools of oil, clouds of steam etc. We pushed it into the side of a parking lot, but the following day the captain instructed to get it moved as there was no insurance for that kind of thing on the base."

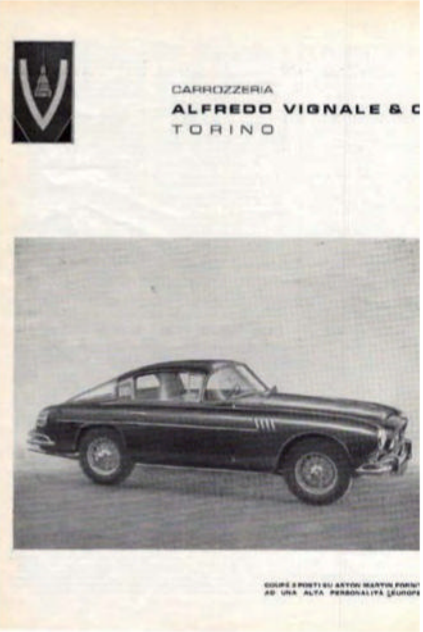
In August 1963, the now immobile Aston was advertised around American military bases in France for $1,000. It was eventually bought by a captain in the US army, TR Mottershead, who transported the now sorry-looking car to America where he later fitted a V8, rear axle and dashboard all from a Pontiac.

The rest of the history is hazy, but by the early Nineties the car found itself in a scrapyard in Virginia, in the US. Thankfully it survived and was rescued by a Roland Wommack who later sold it to Bob Fountain from British specialist, Aston Workshop.

Although the chassis, suspension, transmission, aluminium body panels and much of the unique chrome trim were still there, it was in a poor state with very little left of the original interior. And so, it remained largely untouched until the late 2010s when the Aston Workshop finally took the brave decision to restore the car.

It did come with Toth's rebuilt 2.9-litre engine, but both the block and cylinder head were found to be beyond repair so period-correct replacements were sourced. With fast-road camshafts, Aston Workshop reckons the engine is today producing 175bhp and 200lb ft of torque. The original transmission was reconditioned with the clutch uprated to DB5 specification.

The chassis was renovated where necessary and new hand-formed ash replaced the original timber sections that had rotted. The chassis was then primed, undercoated and powder-coated in satin-finish black.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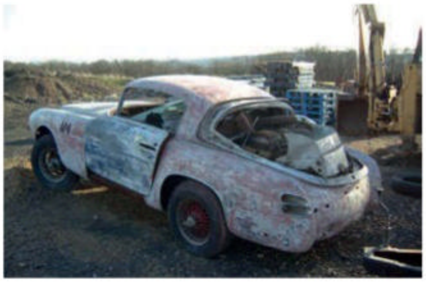
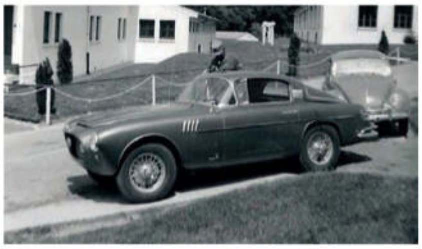
Vignale's advertising from the time included the rebodied Aston Martin



The now derelict car as it was found in a Virginia scrapyard in the early Nineties



The car as it looked in the early Sixties when it was missing the front bumper

Aston Workshop's engineers discovered the Pontiac rear axle, as fitted by the US army captain, was still there which was then replaced with a period-correct Salisbury rear unit. The suspension was also reconditioned.

Amazingly, beneath the tired paintwork, the aluminium bodywork was in good order and so after taking it back to bare metal, it was repaired where necessary before being sprayed in the correct Peacock Blue with Silver Birch for the roof.

The interior was the toughest challenge that the Aston Workshop engineers had faced, since it was still fitted with the Pontiac dashboard that Mottershead had added and it had to be re-created almost entirely from scratch with only a handful of period images to go on.

The restoration took several years to complete, but when I visit Aston Workshop's Durham-based workshop in early 2023, the finished car looks as regal as the day King Baudouin took delivery of it over seven decades earlier.

The soft yet confident curves, together with the big grille and abundance of chrome, make it much more outlandish than the discreet standard design. Only the wire wheels and winged badge on the nose hint at its origins, meaning few (if any) would recognise it as an Aston Martin. Most would suggest a Ferrari which, considering how many cars Vignale designed for the Italian icon, wouldn't be a bad guess.

The profile is certainly reminiscent of its 225 S Berlinetta from 1952, the shape of the grille with the inset driving lights similar to the 1951 212 Inter, while the glass hatch is like that of the 375 America Coupe of 1954.

Yet for me, it's the detailing that really makes the car special. The four chrome vents in the front wing, clever push-button door handles and unusual inset rear light clusters have the delicacy and brightness of a handmade piece of jewellery. Together with the Peacock Blue paint, it gives the car an almost luminous effect.

The interior has all the elegance you'd expect for a car designed and built by an Italian carrozzeria in the Fifties, the rich fawn leather upholstery perfectly in harmony with the Peacock Blue of the dash while there's more brightwork than Liberace's living room. The dials are in an unusual triangular arrangement, the speedo is at the bottom right, making it difficult to read through the large wood-rimmed steering wheel.

Miserable weather stops a proper drive, but even two minutes behind the wheel shows it to be similar to a standard DB2/4, the W.O. Bentley-designed 2.9-litre straight-six engine losing none of its famed brawn, allowing the car to accelerate strongly and easily.

My only criticism is the flat floor and low roof resulting in less interior room than a standard model, which is perhaps the real reason why the six-foot-tall Baudouin sold the car so quickly.

Baudouin's DB2/4 might be a very different kind of Aston Martin from the norm yet it remains a testament, not only to the glamour and excitement of Vignale's beautiful designs, but those lucky few who, like a young Belgian king, could still afford a unique, handmade and coach-built car. **AMD**

●Thanks to: Aston Workshop (www.aston.co.uk)

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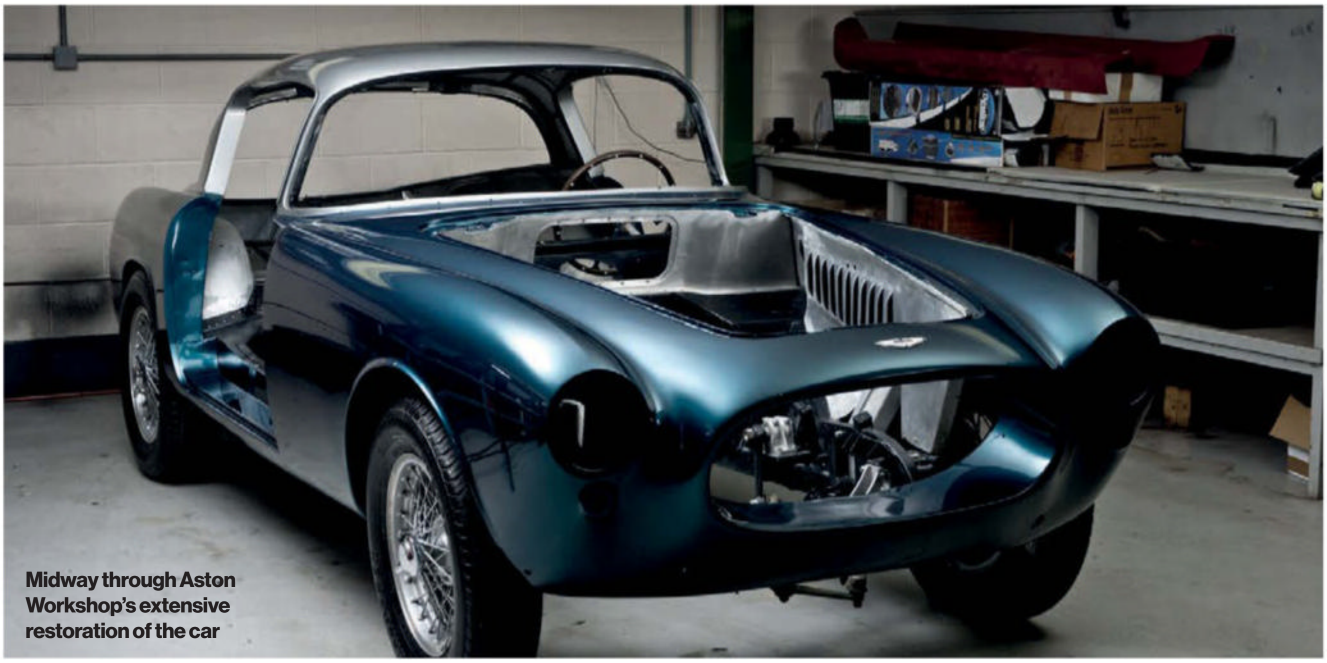


Midway through Aston Workshop's extensive restoration of the car

NAME CHECK

King Baudouin's DB2/4 isn't the only Aston Martin linked to the Vignale name; in 1993, AML revealed a concept named after the famous Italian design house.

Following the coach-built heydays of the Fifties and early Sixties, Vignale's services were soon in decline and he sold his company to Alejandro de Tomaso in 1969, dying in a car crash soon after. De Tomaso then offloaded the company to Ford five years later which already owned rival coachbuilder, Ghia. But while the latter's studio continued albeit integrated into Ford's, Vignale was discontinued and largely forgotten.

In 1992, Ford commissioned Ghia Design to develop a large, four-door saloon concept that could potentially be put into production. It would see the return of the Lagonda name which had been dormant since production of the William Towns-designed model had finished in 1990.

"Although we have no firm programme for the production of a car of this type," said Aston Martin Lagonda's then chairman, Walter Hayes, as a way of explanation, "we believe it is appropriate to investigate and research its appeal with potential customers."

The car's shape was the work of Ghia's Moray Callum, coincidentally the younger brother of Ian who had designed the DB7. With Lagonda not having any consistency in its previous designs, the Scot was able to start with a clean sheet of paper. "We pretty much did what we wanted to do, there wasn't much DNA to hold onto," said Moray Callum at the car's debut. "We just tried to reproduce a flamboyance about the car."

The car couldn't have been more different from the previous model of Lagonda if it tried; instead of the famous wedge, the new car had a bulbous, almost art deco-inspired shape that finished with an elegantly tapered and sloping tail. The stubby nose, relatively short overhangs, immense doors, and low rear cleverly disguised the car's size. Based on the chassis of a 1990 Lincoln Town Car, at 5,236mm long and 1,955mm wide, it was larger than a Rolls-Royce Silver Spirit.

The interior was the work of another Scot, David Wilkie, who continued the exterior's art deco theme and featured lots of circles and soft lines. An English designer, Sally Wilson, then chose natural materials such as aniline-dyed leather, nickel instead of chrome, brass, and beechwood for the instrument panel. The result was a sumptuous atmosphere worthy of the Lagonda badge.

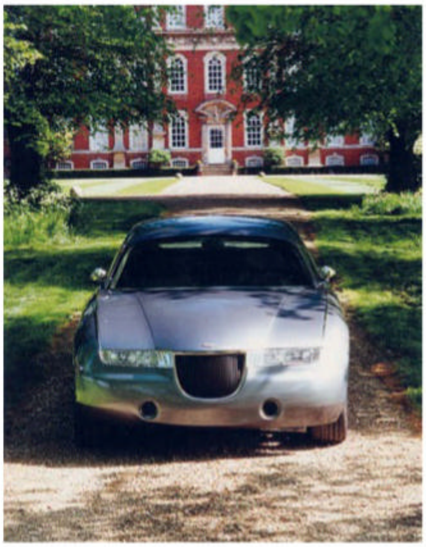
Although it was envisaged any production version would use the new Ford-designed 5.9-litre V12 (that later found its way into the DB7 Vantage from 1999), the concept was instead powered by a 4.6-litre V8 that produced a lethargic 190bhp.

Since 1973, the Ghia name and logo had been associated with the highest trim level of Ford's passenger cars. So, it was decided to christen the new Lagonda after another Ford-owned design house instead, the long defunct Vignale.

Despite the design being generally well-received when it debuted at the 1993 Geneva Motor Show alongside the DB7, Ford got nervous about investing money into relaunching the Lagonda brand and decided to concentrate on the sports car instead.

Ghia built two examples of the Vignale, the non-running silver show car plus a fully functioning second in blue. When it was clear the car wouldn't reach production, the first was destroyed while the second was sold at an auction of Ford prototypes in June 2002 for $403,500.

A third was later produced, but this time at Newport Pagnell. Code-named DP2138, it was based on a smaller Ford chassis and powered by a Jaguar V12 and although the basic shape remained the same, it featured different headlights and a redesigned grille. It was reportedly sold to the Sultan of Brunei in 1995 for £1.3m.



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By Matt James
Editor,
Motorsport News

Why an aggressive 2023 Aston Martin F1 car aims to deliver on the promise

Motorsport News editor Matt James discovers a new philosophy from the Silverstone-based team

Fernando Alonso (left) and Lance Stroll during the unveiling of the AMR23

There were some very forthright words coming from the Aston Martin Formula 1 team at the recent launch of its 2023 challenger, the AMR23. While most other grand prix squads have chosen to adopt an approach of evolution rather than wholesale revolution for the season ahead, the engineering brains trust at Aston was throwing around phrases like "bold" and "aggressive".

There are some pretty solid reasons why the Silverstone-based squad will be reaching even further up the grand prix order this term following its seventh-place finish in 2022.

Huge investment from the brand's owner, Lawrence Stroll, has bankrolled a recruitment drive which has bolstered the engineering strength at the team and taken staff levels from 400 to 800, while Aston Martin is also only weeks away now from having its new Covid-delayed HQ – so comprehensive that it will be called a campus, rather than a factory – completed. It is expected to be active from mid-May.

While that will join up the dots in terms of the all the engineering and manufacturing elements of the grand prix machines and make interaction between the relevant departments more efficient, it will also incorporate a bespoke wind tunnel. It will be the most modern spec among the entire Formula 1 grid and bosses hope it will push Aston ahead of teams like Red Bull, Mercedes and Ferrari.

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So the foundations are (or, at least, very nearly) in place and there have been changes to the front-of-house line-up too. Four-time F1 title winner Sebastian Vettel has retired from the top-flight cockpit and his position in the British Racing Green team will be taken by Spaniard Fernando Alonso, himself a two-time champion. While the 41-year-old isn't in the first flushes of his grand prix career, he brings with him two decades of F1 experience, which is just the type of knowledge base that the ambitious Aston boffins need to tap into. Lawrence Stroll's son Lance will occupy the other seat.

Alonso has seen the potential within the Mercedes-powered team and has been impressed with its growth, particularly in the latter part of 2022. While last year's machine, the AMR22, struggled over the opening portion of the 22-race campaign, it was far more potent in the second half as the engineers applied their grey matter to ironing out the flaws.

That upwards trajectory in the dying throes of last season's competition is what has led Aston – and F1 heavyweight Alonso – to shoot for the stars in 2023.

The AMR23 shows progress from the former chassis but the team's technical director Dan Fallows, who joined the operation midway through 2022, says that it is merely the basis for a season's worth of refinement and improvement.

"The car is very, very different from last year," explains Fallows. "Around 95 percent of the car is totally different from the AMR22. With this year and this development phase, we have tried to be bold and we have tried to be aggressive. We have tried to take on the lessons from last year.

"We did make quite a bit of progress through 2022 with the AMR22 and we wanted to make sure this was a sensible evolution of that but also to create a really good platform to develop on [across the season]. At the same time, though, we wanted to be aggressive and we made sure we gave a big challenge to all the engineers teams to make sure they really had to push themselves. You can see that in the design of the car."

There are some changes that have been mandated for 2023. There was a wholesale rules reset in Formula 1 in 2022 ▶

with a greater reliance on ground effect – the downforce generated from floor of the machine rather than the dependence on aerodynamic wings – and it left some teams scratching their heads.

Many of the leading squads – most notably former dominators Mercedes – produced chassis with were 'porpoising'. It meant the airflow under the car was connecting and disconnecting the levels of downforce as the chassis rode over any bumpy surface and those cars were suffering severe levels of bouncing.

The revamped regulations drew many different solutions last year, but Fallows says there is likely to be a convergence as each crew draws on the lessons from 2022 and adapts to tweaked rules designed to eliminating the bouncing phenomenon.

"I think firstly, on the 2022 regulations, you could see that the cars were very different. They were not only very different from 2021, but they were also very different from each other," explains Fallows. "There were a lot of different interpretations around the rules. We eventually found our own philosophy and a direction we were happy with and you can see that reflected [in the AMR23].

"The thing that really stands out from last year [in terms of differences] is the front end. The front wing particularly, right through to the sidepods, which are very aggressive features, are things we have been working hard on. These are all evolutions, if you like, of the rules as they were.

"The new regulation changes which have come in for this year are not particularly big, and I think visually the cars will be quite similar but there are some quite significant features for us. For example, the mirrors are larger than they were last year. That has been introduced to make visibility a lot better for the drivers. As an aerodynamicist I could say that I am not very happy about that! But I suppose [the drivers] need to be able to see occasionally...

"Another alteration is perhaps a little bit more subtle. That there has been a change to the floor regulations for 2023. The floors have had to be raised in the middle of the car [by 15mm]. That has been made to try and combat the porpoising that we saw quite a lot of last year. For us designers, that has been quite challenging. It presented a bit of a reduction in the downforce of the car and we had to combat that. So not only did we have to make a big step on last year's car, we had to contend with this reduction in downforce."

While the engineering team behind the Cognizant-backed machine is confident that it has put together a chassis which is capable of stepping up, Alonso is full of optimism too. While no driver is actively going to target any other position than first, the two-time Le Mans 24 Hours winner knows that joining Aston Martin at this particular time means he will be part of its continued journey to reach the top. World championships might not be on the radar just at this point.

"We need to make sure that we have a good baseline for future Aston Martin F1 cars," Alonso says. "Last year, I think the team went through with some difficulties during the first part of the season but it had a good second part of the year. We have to see that progress too through into 2023.

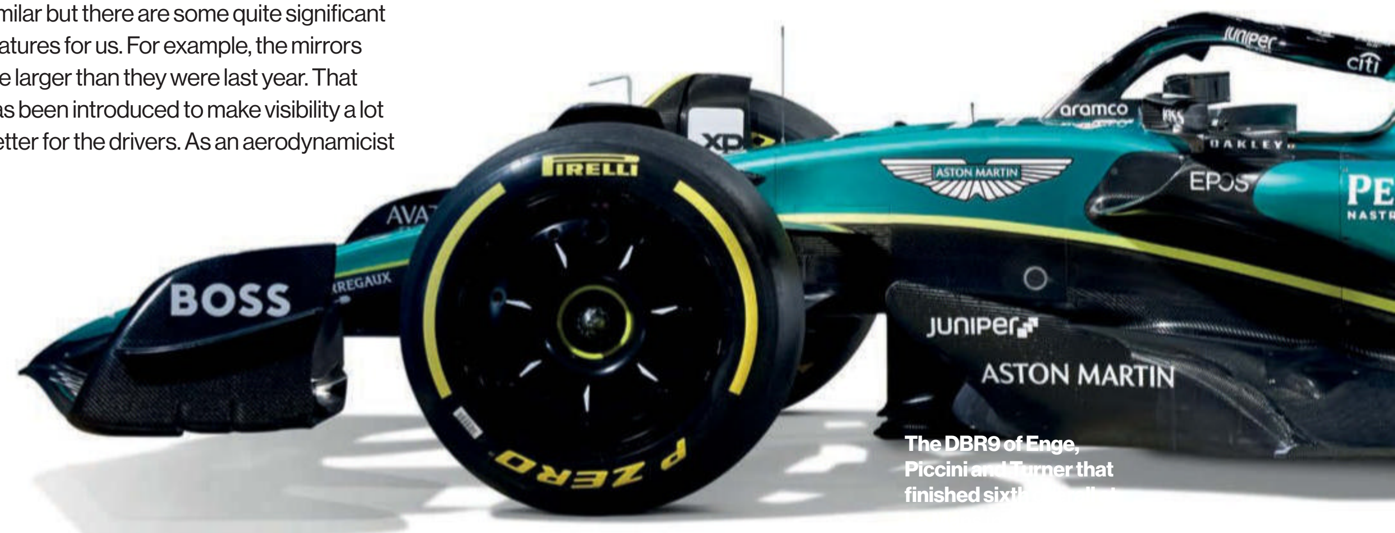
"We want to keep our feet on the ground, but we would not be happy with fourth, we will not be happy with third, we will not be happy with second. It is all about winning. Maybe we can't win immediately, but we been to make sure that this car is a good baseline for future successes in future years."

Alonso says an existing relationship with Lawrence Stroll and seeing his vision for the success of Aston Martin – both as a road-car brand and as a top-level Formula 1 team – was part of his decision to split from the Renault-backed Alpine operation and sign on for 2023.

"I think the new people who were joining the team [were factor in my decision to join the squad]," says Alonso. "It shows how ambitious everything is in this project. The leadership of Lawrence Stroll is obviously a big thing for me as well. This investment plus the talent is usually a good recipe for success in Formula 1. Hopefully we can make that success come as soon as possible – and we will try to make some shortcuts there.

"It has been quite amazing getting to know my new team. For the last few months of 2022 we were in contact and from January I have been at the factory. I have done some simulator sessions and I have met lots of new people and I have visited the new facilities that will be ready soon. I am feeling a lot of energy from the good things going on in the team now. Everything is good and I can't wait to get started."

The occupant of the other seat, Lance Stroll, had what could be termed as a difficult 2022. The Canadian recorded a best finish of sixth place in the rain-affected Singapore GP but he languished in 15th spot in the drivers' points.



The DBR9 of Enge, Piccini and Turner that finished sixth [illegible]

For a man about to enter his seventh season in the top level and who has been on the podium on three previous occasions, that marked a downturn. It wasn't helped by the early struggles for the AMR22 but he knows that he needs to make genuine progress in 2023.

"If we can consistently be fighting for good points that would be good, and podiums if the chance is there," explains the 24-year-old. "I think it is just about making another step from where we were last year. Last year we were the ninth team at the beginning of the season and then we just missed out sixth in the constructors' championship and we were equal on points with Alfa Romeo which was actually a great recovery in the second half of the season.

"I think this season, fighting further up the field again has to be the aim and the goal. I am definitely looking forward to seeing where we are in the field this year."

Fernando Alonso brings with him two decades of experience

Lance Stroll will hope 2023 sees him return to the podium

The story of Aston Martin' march to the top of Formula 1 might well be in its opening chapters at the moment but the man with his hand on the tiller, Lance Stroll, has consistently stated that World titles are his aim since taking over the operation from Racing Point in 2021. His comments at the launch of the AMR23 show that none of that desire has been blunted by some tough maiden campaigns.

"The people we have recently brought in, alongside the people we already had, are bringing this to a whole new level and we are looking forward to fighting for World championships in the future," says Stroll Sr.

"Formula 1, like any other business, is a journey. This will only be our third year on this journey. As I think everybody knows, whether it is Formula 1 or any other business, it takes a little longer than three years but the plan this year is to make a real step and then next year make another step and then another. We will do that until we are winning and ultimately fighting for World championships.

"The formula for a winning grand prix team is 'people, process and tools'. Our new HQ will provide us with the greatest tools, we already have some of the greatest people, and we will put in the processes."

Stroll Sr is quite forthright in his aims and objectives for Aston Martin in Formula 1. But he has, so far, let his money do the talking. The new HQ, the ambitious AMR23 and the recruitment of Fernando Alonso to the driving strength and all the technical brains who have signed up to the project are all serious statements of that intent. There is only one thing left to conquer now and it possibly the most basic component of all: the stopwatch. **AMD**

CHILTERN ASTO

L-R: Guy and Gordon Wyles in Chiltern Aston Centre's well stocked showroom

ON CENTRE
Sales Office

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WALTON

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

With its origins going back to the late Sixties, Chiltern Aston Centre Ltd is one of the UK's most established experts in the British marque. We head to its Hertfordshire headquarters to discover more of this heritage and its current services

TO DESCRIBE Chiltern Aston Centre Ltd as just another specialist would be like calling James Bond just another spy film or The Beatles just another pop group. With its origins going back to the late Sixties and its wide range of services including a renowned and officially approved Body Repair Centre; a highly experienced engineering department; a Heritage Parts department and a well-stocked showroom, Chiltern Aston Centre Ltd is one of the UK's leading marque experts.

"We are fairly unique in that we are an official Aston Martin Heritage Partner and an Aston Martin Approved Body Repair Centre" explains Guy Wyles, "our technicians have also been factory trained, and have the correct manufacturers tooling for the Gaydon Era and Heritage cars".

The company's foundations began in 1968 when the now chairman, Gordon Wyles, set himself up as a mobile mechanic in the Bovingdon area of Hertfordshire.

An important moment in the company's early years came when

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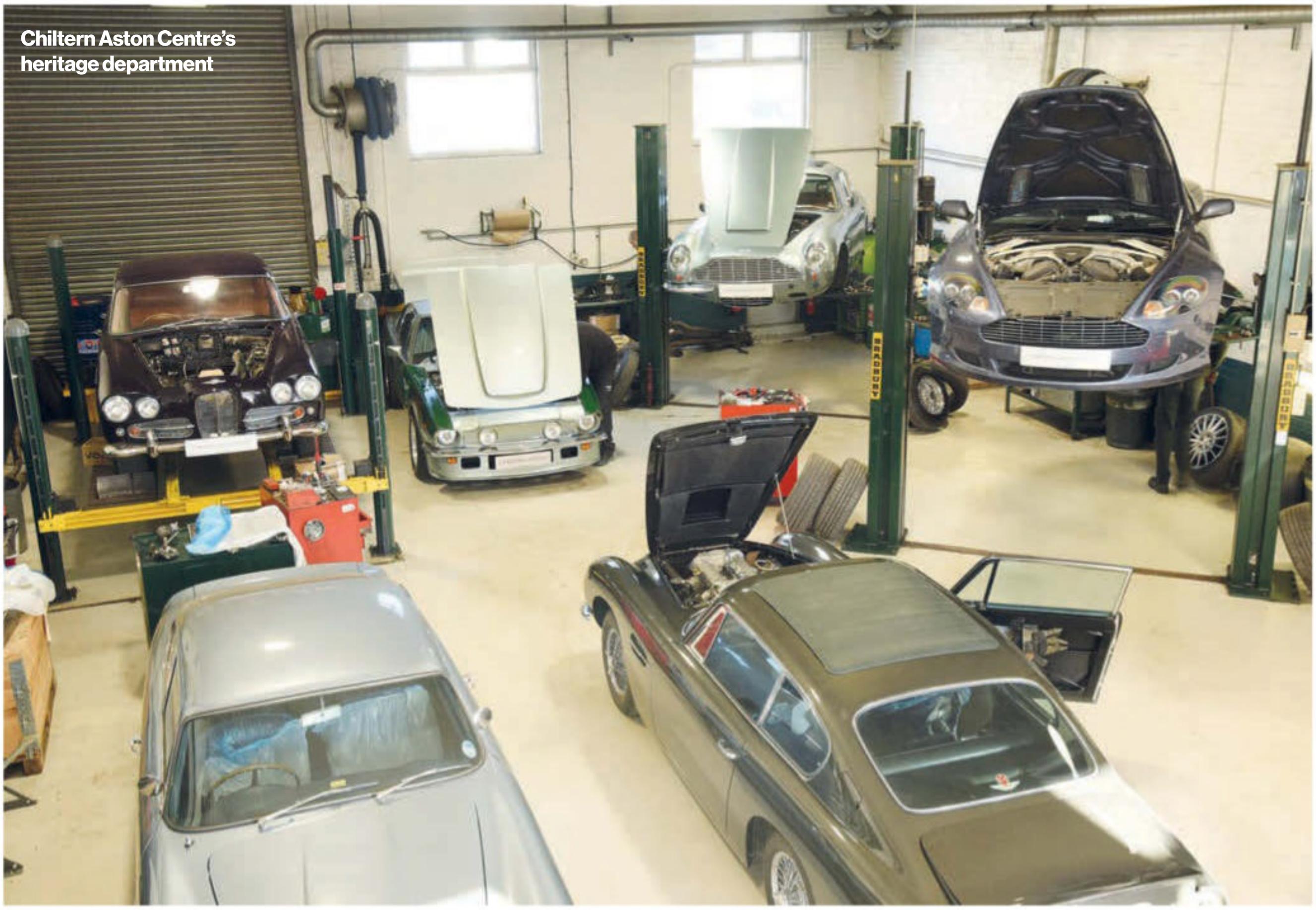

Chiltern Aston Centre's heritage department

Gordon was asked to maintain a fleet of vans for a local company. The owner subsequently bought an Aston Martin and asked Gordon to also look after his DB6. "He said, 'You already do my other vehicles so you might as well look after my Aston Martin'."

With Gordon soon servicing another DB6 in the immediate area, this marks the start of his association with the marque. And 55 years later he's personally just as committed, having owned a beautiful DB6 Vantage Mk II for over four decades.

The early Seventies saw Gordon and his then business partner rent a small building at the same location as where the company is still based, buying the complete property outright a few years later. Still a general garage looking after many makes of cars, the marques steadily became increasingly higher end.

Gordon suggests their location on the Hertfordshire / Buckinghamshire boarder and its inhabitant stock broker belt catalysed the company's migration to becoming a specialist in top end marques. "They all had fashionable cars," he explains, "and tended to change them regularly." Originally named Car Care Works, Gordon and his growing team of mechanics and body shop technicians soon began looking after BMWs, Jaguar E-types, Bentley & Rolls Royce, Jensen Interceptors, several Ferraris and even a few Lamborghinis. By the late Eighties Gordon took the decision to concentrate more on Aston Martins. "We already looked after quite a lot of them," remembers Gordon,

A DB9 is inspected on a ramp

ASTON MARTIN
ASTON MARTIN
APPROVED
BODY REPAIR CENTRE

"and owners tend to migrate to where there's enthusiasm and capability."

The company's position as a specialist in the British marque was consolidated in the mid Nineties when, with Jaguar about to release the XK8 which would pose a considerable threat to the DB7, the brand's leading franchised dealer, Aston Martin Sales of Mayfair (who already came to Car Care Works for body work) asked it to create a special version to drum up publicity.

"Essentially, the instruction we received was make the car 'look more purposeful'," explains Gordon." And so the body shop designed and developed power bulges with louvres for the bonnet while the plastic 'egg box' grille were replaced with a stainless steel mesh grille (the inspiration coming from the nose of the Bentley that won the Le Mans 24 Hours in both 1929 and 1930, the famous 'Old Number One', that happened to be in Gordon's showroom). The GTS also had split-rim, five-spoke Speedline alloys, sports exhaust, white dials, and subtle yellow detailing around the radiator grille. Many were further spec'd with optional stainless steel switchgear, tubular exhaust manifold and AP racing brakes. The company had clearly fulfilled its brief. Called the DB7 GTS, Aston Martin Sales of Mayfair ordered seven, one for each of their dealers. However, due to the success of the car a further 60 DB7, DB7 Vantage GTS and GTS 2 were built, the later GTS 2 gaining round rear lights similar to the supercharged V8 Vantage.

Clearly no longer a general garage, it was around this time when the company changed its name to the more fitting Chiltern Aston Centre.

Although Gordon had always bought and sold cars, it was very much on an ad hoc basis, usually helping clients source cars or find a buyer for their existing ones. This changed in the late Nineties when Derek Campbell joined the company from Aston Martin Sales of Mayfair, later becoming Managing Director. Due to his extensive experience with Aston Martin and specifically his expertise in the DB7, Chiltern Aston quickly became the UK's leading providers of previously enjoyed DB7s.

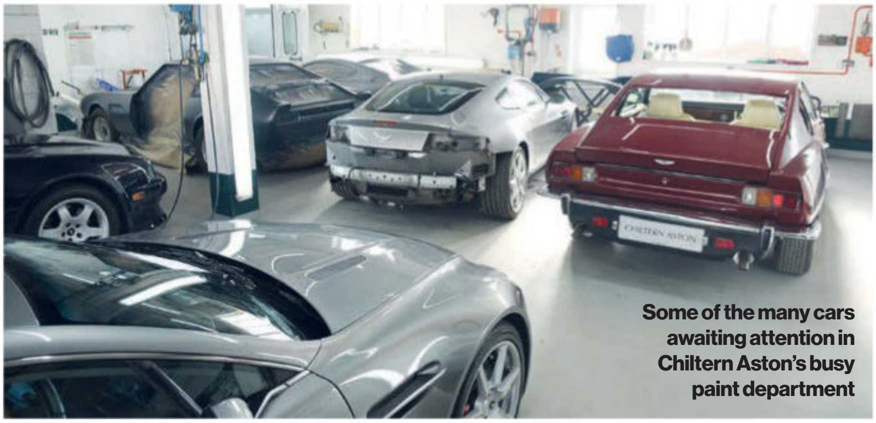
Although much has changed in the five decades since Gordon first started the business, engineering remains at its heart. This was confirmed in 2004 when it was appointed one of 12 Worldwide Aston Martin Heritage Partners, which was followed two years later by becoming an official Aston Martin Approved Body Repair Centre.

In 2009, and due to meeting Aston Martin Lagonda's stringent standards in its workshops, processes, tooling, diagnostic equipment, and factory training, Chiltern Aston was the first ▶

Stripped of its body, a DB5's chassis is repaired in the body shop

> ***'The experience gained from the City was tremendously useful for working with these cars which are increasingly viewed as assets.'***

A DB4, DB5, V8 Vantage and DB9 represent almost all of the eras Chiltern Aston caters for



Some of the many cars awaiting attention in Chiltern Aston's busy paint department

marque specialist to be appointed an 'Aston Martin Approved Repairer' which allowed the company to service and repair the then new Gaydon Era cars.

Although the Approved Repairer scheme is no longer run by the factory, when Gordon and Guy show me around Chiltern's extensive site, it's easy to understand how and why it was awarded these official accolades. With engineering divided into four separate sections – workshops for both Heritage and New Era cars plus a paint & prep room and separate panel shop – it's a highly established, well-appointed, and extremely organised facility.

Other than trimming and full engine rebuilds (which are sent to trusted third parties), between these four sections Chiltern has the ability to service, repair and restore any model of Aston Martin or Lagonda from the Fifties all the way up to 2018 model year cars. In the body panel shop is the skeletal-like chassis of a DB4 series 5 Vantage, the lack of outer panels revealing its tubular Superleggera construction. Gordon shows me the many areas that will need replacing, most caused by shoddy workmanship of past repairs by people unknown. He tells me the bodywork team will fabricate all the new panels required using traditional methods including an English wheel to manipulate the sheets of steel and aluminum into the shapes needed.

A business is only as good as its staff and many of the senior team have been with Gordon for a quarter of century – a few even longer – resulting in an unparalleled collective level of experience and knowledge.

Interestingly, one of the newest members to the Chiltern team is Gordon's son, Guy Wyles, who joined in 2018. Although his childhood was surrounded by Aston Martins, Guy initially trod his own path and enjoyed a successful career in the City. However, when Derek Campbell decided to take a step back, Guy came in to support the sales side of the business and was made director a few years later.

Although both are keen to stress the continuing success of the sales department is down to the foundations laid by Derek, Guy admits he's brought his own approach to sales. "The experience gained from the City was tremendously useful for working with these cars which are increasingly viewed as assets."

As Aston Martin and its cars have changed, Chiltern Aston has needed to follow suit, with Guy expanding sales to the Gaydon Era along with creating a new, more expansive website and bolstering the company's advertising. "Word of mouth could no longer solely grow the business," he explains. "Younger owners of the 'New Era' cars often felt franchised dealers were their only choice. The biggest difference I've made is to make Chiltern more visible and Google friendly."

Guy is incredibly choosey with the examples he stocks. "We don't just bring in a car and sell it," he tells me. "It's has to pass both the service and body shop inspections, and many don't." Every car in Chiltern's showroom is inspected and then prepared by the workshops, giving the customer genuine peace of mind, as the reams of positive online reviews testify. "I want our clients to be overjoyed with their purchase and delighted to have come to us."

Similarly to how Chiltern Aston Centre Ltd isn't just another Aston Martin specialist, it's clear for Gordon, Guy and the Chiltern team, their clients who rely on their services are not 'just another customer'. **AMD**

P7 GTS
ASTON MARTIN DB7 GTS

A brochure for the DB7 GTS that Chiltern Aston developed for Sales of Mayfair in the mid-Nineties

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FROM THE CLUBHOUSE

Aston Martin enthusiasts welcome

Imagine you've just picked up the keys to one of the most incredible cars in the world. What now? Drive it to work and impress the colleagues? Keep it in a garage for an investment? Or join a great club and enjoy experiences with people who've done just the same as you. The love of this iconic marque is almost palpable at events, both by our members and spectators.

It's a rare person who doesn't love the sound of the engine when an Aston Martin starts and roars into motion. It's music to the ears of every enthusiast and despite the name, we're not here just for owners, but for enthusiasts too. Many of our members remember their infatuation for the marque since childhood and joined the club, even before they ever drove or owned one. For some, infatuation turns to devotion and before they know it, they've been a life-long member.

For pride, for pleasure and for passion, the drivers of these timeless wonders take to the roads and tirelessly curate displays that are admired world-wide. For anyone who's on the circuit of car rallies, concours and track events, this is a familiar pastime, but with the Aston Martin Owners Club, there is something quite exceptional about being part of this association. Glance around a car event, like the famous Silverstone Festival, where most marques you can think of are on display and you're sure to see an abundance of admirers around the Aston Martins.

Our track-based events have been organised time and time again by some of our dedicated area representatives who love nothing more than a gathering of like-minded people getting the best performance out of their cars in an exhilarating experience. The Speed Series brings its own competitive element as we join other car clubs for a series of timed sprints around the country. Personal

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- Member official discounts
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bests get beaten and the banter between clubs is great for the team spirit.

For enthusiasts of engineering, we have a wealth of information on our club forum on all things Aston Martin and a series of open days to visit high performance car engineering companies. From racing cars to heritage restorers, the technician can be satisfied that there's something on offer.

Some of the finest and rarest Aston Martin cars from around the world are registered in our club and are only taken out on special occasions and often under the scrutiny of concours judges. These are a rare breed, both the entrants and the judges. Many an entrant can be found under an umbrella in the pouring rain, cleaning tyres and the inside of an exhaust in an attempt to impress a judge and win a much-coveted trophy. Hampton Court Palace Concours d'Elegance is well-attended by our members, as is the Salon Privé at Blenheim Palace and the striking Pebble Beach event in the US. But our own AMOC Concours d'Etat, which was once hosted by willing members in their back gardens is now a weekend-long package of dinners, lunches, driving tours and rounding off with the concours, in the most spectacular settings.

But amidst all the speed and elegance of the club, our local events are the back-bone of the AMOC, organised by a fantastic team of area representatives who work relentlessly to engage our members in the pastime of motoring and motorsport. A pie and a pint in the local pub, or a quick drive out for breakfast on a sunny Sunday morning is happening every week around the world in the AMOC. As well as international tours, lectures, virtual Q&A sessions and a wealth of other Aston Martin related events, it's our membership that make the club the fantastic family that it is.

You'd be very welcome to go along to any of our events, local or national, even international and see what you think for yourself. To quote one of our long-standing members, "I joined for the cars and stayed for the friends". **AMD**

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ASTON MARTIN DBS

1969, £145,000. Registered 1st August 1969 this Aston Martin DBS coupe has been residing in France over recent years. Prior to this the history file includes details of engine and suspension rebuilds. Where MOT certificates indicate very little use over the last 15 years, the car has more recently benefited from a replacement five speed Tremec gearbox, a full repaint in California Sage and a complete interior re trim. Supplied fully serviced with 12 months MOT. Please call 01993 849610, South East. (T)

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ASTON MARTIN *drivers*

To mark the 100th anniversary of Carroll Shelby's birth, we look at the career of this iconic American who won the 1959 Le Mans

Carroll Shelby's victory at the 1959 Le Mans 24 Hours for Aston Martin firmly cemented the American's place in the history of European racing. Yet this was only one highlight in a highly illustrious career that saw success on both sides of the Atlantic and the cockpit.

Born in Leesburg, Texas, on 11 January 1923, Shelby's interest in cars began at a young age, learning how to drive in a Willys. "I raced everybody who wanted to race," he said years later.

Following graduation from high school in 1942, Shelby enlisted in the Army Air Corps that saw him take to the skies in B-17 Flying Fortresses and many other heavy bombers throughout the second world war. After leaving the army, he started his own truck business before becoming an oil worker and then a poultry farmer. It was all of his chickens dying in 1952 that pushed him towards racing. "I'd always wanted to be a racing driver," he said during a 1991 interview. "I was 29 years old and I said, 'To hell with it, I'm going out to do that.'"

He originally used a friend's MG TC before moving to a much faster Cadillac-powered Allard J2X. It was by finishing tenth in the 1954 Buenos Aires 1,000km race in January that resulted in an invitation by Aston Martin's team manager, John Wyer, to drive a DBR3S at Sebring two months later. Although retiring due to a broken rear axle, Shelby continued with the British team in Europe throughout the year.

Shelby stayed largely in America for the next three seasons. Extremely fast and always consistent, he enjoyed great success, winning three national driver's championships in that time.

He returned to Europe for 1958 to again drive for Aston Martin. With the DBR1 underpowered and often fragile, results were thin on the ground with a second at that year's Tourist Trophy being a highlight. With Aston concentrating on its burgeoning Formula One effort for 1959, Shelby raced the DBR/4 single seater four times but with little success.

Yet the company still entered three DBR/1s into the Le Mans 24 Hours when Shelby was teamed with Aston regular, Roy Salvadori. Despite running fifth at the start, retirements meant the pair took the lead on the Saturday evening, which they held on to into the night. Damage to the nearside rear tyre caused a vibration which took a ten-minute pit stop at 2am to diagnose, handing the lead to the Ferrari 250 of Phil Hill and Olivier Gendebien. But the Italian car retired a few hours later, giving victory to Shelby and Salvadori.

"It felt wonderful," said the American years later. "Aston never quite had the horsepower and so Ferrari was always quicker down the straights but we probably had better preparation than Ferrari at the time. That was the high point of my life as far as driving racing cars."

Despite arguably being at the height of his career, Shelby retired at the end of the following year after being diagnosed with heart condition which he took nitroglycerine for.

Shelby would become arguably more famous as a constructor than as a driver especially after he fitted a Ford V8 to the diminutive AC Ace sports car in 1964, creating the famous Cobra. The car was raced with great success especially with a more aerodynamic body. Named the Daytona, after the circuit where it first raced, the car finished first in the GT class and fourth overall at the 1964 24 Hours of Le Mans. On the strength of this, Ford later asked him to turn the disappointing GT40 into race winner and in 1966 it won Daytona, Sebring and Le Mans.

Starting with the GT350-based Ford Mustang in 1965, Shelby became even more associated with higher performance versions of production cars, later doing the same with Dodge, Chrysler and Oldsmobile. His name is once again with Ford, since Shelby American is modifying the current generation of Mustang.

Shelby died on May 10 2012, at the age of 89. Although perhaps better known today as a car manufacturer, he will also be remembered as a great driver and part of Aston's sole Le Mans victory. **AMD**

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